HE DRAMA IN ENGLISH

WALTER PRICHARD EATON

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THE DRAMA IN ENGLISH

BY

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TO
FREDERICK H. KOCH

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

There is but one ideal way to study the history and progress of English (or any other) drama; that is to witness a typical play of each period performed by competent actors, on a stage as nearly as possible approximating that for which it was written. And even this method of study would not be quite ideal, because we could not ourselves reproduce the original audiences. Try as we might, we could not be the gaping crowd of naïve mediæval townsmen at a mystery, nor the beaux and belles of Restoration London, nor even the early Victorians who, in the vast spaces of Covent Garden, watched Macready, as *Virginius,* do his daughter to death with a dagger and much rhetoric. Like nothing else, except a joke, a play is for its age and audience. Few plays, indeed, survive their age and audience, even the very best. Out of the eighteenth century in England have survived to us poems innumerable, novels, essays, satires, and songs. But only three plays. From the great age of Elizabeth, when the English stage reached what the strictly literary critics have long considered its peak, no plays have survived in the modern theatre except a limited number of Shakespeare's. All the rest, which Lamb and Hazlitt and Swinburne and others tell us are such marvellous works of genius, are to-day theatrically as dead as their authors. They were for their time and age, and when the times changed, tastes altered, the age grew graver or gayer as the case might be, they lost their appeal. In the Restoration, Beaumont and Fletcher and Ben Jonson were more highly regarded than Shakespeare; possibly, even, they were in their own day. So great a critic as Dryden could go quite

wrong in the matter. And who, in our age, can pick the plays which will live for fifty years? Who that is old enough to remember the 1890's but remembers, for instance, the excitement roused by "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray"—and the complete, almost abysmal lack of excitement when it was revived by a famous actress thirty years later?

But the fact that we cannot predict with any certainty the life of a play should not—and never does—prevent our present enjoyment of it. We do not, in the theatre, react to a play according to its timeless elements alone, but quite as much to its timely ones, according to its capacity to rouse in us that warm emotional response which is the very life of the acted drama, and which is so often dependent on overtones of feeling and suggestion which are part of the atmosphere of an age. Hence any study of the drama of the past is bound to be provisional and incomplete, even if we had a company of actors to play all the parts for us. The nearest we can hope to get, under ordinary conditions, will be, no doubt, a long way from the facts.

But few of us will get anywhere at all if we attempt to study the drama as a form of printed literature. We must study it as a form of dialogue, spoken by living actors on a stage, and a particular kind of stage, before a living audience, and a particular kind of audience. We must read it aloud if possible, for it was written only to be spoken, and always with our visual imagination and our historical sensibilities at full tension. We must try to get back into ancient playhouses, with the audiences of those days, and feel the drama as current entertainment. If we can do that with even a moderate degree of success we should gain in understanding of the past, and in our grasp of those principles of dramatic construction and stage technique which have been tried, developed, some-

times discarded, in the long procession of English drama down into the theatre of our own day.

There are numerous textbooks available on various periods of the English drama, and a few which trace the entire drama throughout its long development. It is a simple matter for any student, working by himself, to learn the dry names of the leading playwrights of every age, to read some of their plays, to absorb critical estimates of them (sometimes, to be sure, based almost entirely on their literary, not their dramatic value). This volume does not assume to give a complete history of the English drama or theatre, nor detailed critical estimates of all the leading playwrights. Its purpose is quite other.

It attempts first to give enough of the general outline of English dramatic history to make a running story and set intelligibly certain specific plays into their historic place. More detailed knowledge can be secured by those with time and inclination, from the appended lists of reference books. Secondly, it attempts to sketch the physical playhouse, the tone and temper of the audience, the spirit of the times—all factors conditioning the drama. And, finally, it analyses certain typical plays of each period from the point of view of the stage craftsman, or, let us say, of the acted as opposed to the "literary" drama. These analyses are, of course, not exhaustive; they could not be in the compass of one volume. They are, rather, intended as suggestions to the teacher or leader of the study group, and will certainly be of most value if the plays are studied informally by the group, read aloud when possible, with every encouragement given to spontaneous dramatic expression, even to attempts to reproduce roughly something of the original scheme of production (a comparatively simple matter in Elizabethan dramas), and to critical com-

ment by the students drawn from their own reaction to the plays, or from their experience in the modern theatre. In a word, this is an elementary outline study of the drama in English, considered always as entertainment produced in the theatre for the enjoyment and stimulation of English-speaking audiences. Inasmuch as no professional drama is produced for any other purpose, the first step in understanding the history of our stage is to get the sense of its dramas in action, to acquire such knowledge of the past as most of us have of the present, from our actual theatre-going.

So far as possible, the plays chosen for study are those which can be found in a limited number of student collections, and the books of reference necessary for a further understanding of any period have been chosen with a view to their inclusiveness. When the modern drama is reached, many plays may have to be secured in separate editions, and it is difficult to find works of reference and criticism which are inclusive. But on the whole, this book does not require for its effective use a large library, and those volumes which it does require form the nucleus of a working dramatic collection. Any club or study group which gathers them together in the process of employing this text can thereafter give them to the school or public library with confidence in their continued usefulness.

Once more, the author must repeat that the object of this book is neither to supply detailed history nor literary criticism, but to guide the average person to an actual reading of representative plays, so that he understands their place in the development of drama, and still more so that he comes to feel what sort of effect they had on the audiences of their own day and generation, so that he senses them as popular entertainment, catches their style and color and mood, stocks his

memory with certain pictures which come back to him when he goes to the theatre to-day, making richer and subtler his enjoyment of our modern drama. You can read to the end of time what day Congreve was born, the names of the plays he wrote, how he was afflicted with the gout, and when he died—but that will not give you much of an idea of Restoration comedy, that Comedy of Manners which has so profoundly influenced our stage ever since. But if, with the methods of Restoration staging and the mood of Restoration audiences in mind, the student reads aloud—or, better, two fellow students read aloud—the famous scene in "The Way of the World," where *Millamant* lays down the law to *Mirabell,* telling him under what conditions she may consent to "dwindle into a wife," then true understanding will begin to come.

This book merely speaks the prologues and draws the curtains on important plays. Unless you remain to view the performances, the author's time and yours will have been wasted.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
How to Use This Book	vii
1. What is Drama?	1
2. The Beginnings of Modern Drama	5
3. The First Plays in the Church	12
4. Transition from Church to Market-Square, and from Latin to Vernacular	19
5. The Brome Abraham and Isaac, and the Second Shepherds' Play	31
6. Moralities	44
7. Interludes	55
8. The First English Comedy — "Ralph Roister Doister"	63
9. John Lyly's Court Comedies	68
10. The First Permanent Theatres	74
11. Marlowe, Blank Verse, and the Spirit of the Renaissance—"Dr. Faustus"	89
12. Shakespeare	100
13. Ben Jonson	110
14. "A Woman Killed with Kindness" and "The Duchess of Malfi"	123
15. Beaumont and Fletcher	136
16. Drama Under Charles I—The Age of Transition and Decline	145
17. The Restoration	153
18. Congreve's "Love for Love"	165

PAGE

19. "Venice Preserved" 171
20. Farquhar and "The Beaux' Stratagem" 176
21. The Eighteenth Century 182
22. Lillo's Prose Tragedy and "The Beggars' Opera" . 190
23. Eighteenth Century—Second Half 197
24. "The Road to Ruin" and "Pizarro" 206
25. The Early Nineteenth Century 215
26. Madame Vestris and "London Assurance" . . . 220
27. In America, to the Civil War 227
28. The Robertson Comedy 237
29. W. S. Gilbert 243
30. Henry Arthur Jones and Arthur Wing Pinero . . 247
31. G. B. Shaw 261
32. J. M. Barrie 273
33. John Galsworthy 283
34. "Local" Drama and the Irish Revival—Synge and O'Casey 287
35. America After the Civil War 293
36. David Belasco, Clyde Fitch and William Vaughn Moody 302
37. The Growth of Native Styles and Experiment . . 313
38. Paul Green and the Folk Theatre—Eugene O'Neill 326

Bibliography 345
Index 357

THE
DRAMA IN ENGLISH

1

WHAT IS DRAMA?

What is drama? What are the peculiar qualities which make a story, a situation, dramatic—that is, adapted for successful presentation on a stage? What, indeed, to go still deeper, is the explanation of the human instinct to create dramas, or to witness and enjoy them? Until these questions are answered, or at least until we have a clear understanding of their implications, no study of the theatre can proceed, though of course it is in the study of the theatre itself that we must seek the most satisfactory and most nearly final conclusion.

A play or drama, as we know it to-day, consists, roughly speaking, of a story told by living actors, who pretend to be (who impersonate) the characters of that story. Consequently, the story is conveyed to us by means of dialogue, gesture, facial expression, and so on. We are not told *about* an occurrence or crisis—we actually witness it. The actors are of extreme importance. Indeed, it is their act of impersonation which seems, at first, most strikingly to differentiate the drama from other forms of narrative. This has always been true. Primitive peoples, in their tribal dances and other observances, impersonate, converting the ceremonies into a form of drama. Children, playing, "pretend" to be Indians, pirates, and the like, improvising dialogue and suitable action, making swords of crossed sticks and battlements of sand piles, with great intensity and manifest enjoyment. It would

seem that the dramatic instinct, or the instinct to impersonate, is deeply rooted and universal, and like all such instincts must have good reason behind it. When children grow up, or when peoples become more highly civilized, they cease themselves to impersonate, leaving that to actors on a stage, but as they sit in the audience they measure the success of the actors and the play by the degree to which belief, or illusion, is compelled in *them;* in other words, they call that the successful play which makes them, the audience, take part imaginatively if not physically. They continue, after all, to impersonate. If they do not, the play, they declare, "doesn't seem real," fails to establish illusion, and is a failure.

Now, this act of impersonation, either directly or by imaginative sympathy, undoubtedly releases the personality, gives the sense, for a brief time, that you are breaking down the walls of self and uniting with or sharing the life of others, even if they are but imagined characters. It enlarges and intensifies experience. It helps to satisfy the eternal human curiosity about the world outside ourselves. It enables us to feel emotions that in our normal existence we might never know. It is an expansion of the ego—something which is always pleasant!

But, you may say, a story read by us or to us may do that; which is true. The drama is distinguished from the narrative by more than the technique of representing the story by living actors, impersonating each character, so that we *see* the event happening instead of being told about it.

What this distinguishing quality is, many have attempted to define, no one perhaps with entire success. A study of hundreds of successful plays led the French critic, Ferdinand Brunetière, in the nineteenth century, to popularize the theory (he did not invent it), since widely accepted, that the

essence of drama is struggle, at the heart of every true play is a contest, and it is that contest which rouses our sympathy and excitement. A Greek hero struggles against Fate, *Hamlet* against his own inner nature, the parson in "Candida" against the poet, and so on endlessly. It is unquestionably true that the element of struggle, either against other men and women, or against one's own nature, or external forces, is found in a vast percentage of the world's dramas. It is also found, probably, in a considerable percentage of children's imaginative games. But there are some plays, and many situations in other plays, where it is impossible to find the element of contest, yet we feel them to be dramatic, and know them to be successful in the theatre. When, for example, *Rip Van Winkle* returns from the mountains, he may be said to struggle for recognition, and with his own bewilderment; but when once he is recognized, our pleasure comes not at all from any struggle (except momentarily as the deceitful *Derrick* is discomforted), but from the humor of watching *Rip* slip back into his old ways and once again gurgle his familiar toast into his tipped mug. What is dramatic here seems to be a picture of character.

Realizing that there can be what we feel as drama, or at any rate what can greatly interest us when depicted on the stage, without the element of struggle, and yet sensing that in this competitive world it is the spectacle of struggle which most quickly and keenly rouses our emotions, takes us out of ourselves, Professor George P. Baker has used *dramatic* to mean "creative of emotional response." "That is dramatic," he says, "which by representation of imaginary personages, interests, through its emotions, an average audience assembled in a theatre." There are many things which interest us in books, which would not interest us if put into the mouths

of "imaginary personages" and spoken from the stage of a theatre, because our emotions would not be aroused. The drama, fundamentally, is a thing of action, of visible men and women doing and saying certain things. Those things must wake our interest, stir our emotions, touch our sympathy. Nothing, of course, so quickly rouses our emotions and sympathy as the sight of a person we like struggling and suffering, and nothing pleases most of us more than the sight of his triumph over somebody we do not like. Accordingly, we may say that in the majority of successful plays the dramatic element is supplied by some form of struggle or contest; and in *all* of them it is supplied by rousing our emotions through the process of identifying ourselves imaginatively with some character or characters. On the vitality or illusion of its characters and its power to wake our emotions, the success of every play depends.

But that is not to say, of course, that a character which can create illusion in one age can do so in the next, or that the things which roused emotion in 1500 will rouse emotion in the twentieth century. Nor does it tell us much of the technical processes by which the dramatist and actors create illusion. These things can be learned only by a study of the theatre itself.

2

THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERN DRAMA

It is well known to almost every one that the drama, as a conscious art form, presented by actors in a theatre, was found in ancient Greece, where it developed out of the primitive religious ceremonies, and reached a tragic depth, and also a comic verve, certainly comparable with that of any drama in modern times. The drama of the Athenian golden age lived on in the ancient world, spreading as far as Greek influence spread, though doubtless in a debased form as Athenian culture declined, and passed over as a heritage to the Roman conquerors. The Romans wrote both tragedies and comedies of their own, though the former especially were a long way from the poetic grandeur and impressive sincerity achieved by the great Greek tragic poets; and in the long process of development which went on in the Roman world, the theatre always found a place. So far as the development of the Roman world was toward a love of luxury and pleasure, and a laxity of morals, the theatre quite naturally found a place not always commendable, for there seems always to have been an element of holiday connected with theatre-going, even in Greece, and even when the play was to be a tragedy by Æschylus. Of course the comic drama readily lends itself to debasement, to impropriety of speech and action, if the audience so desires. At any rate, the Roman or Latinized cities which flourished around the shores of the Mediterranean, and elsewhere in the vast empire of the

Cæsars, had not only their gladiatorial arenas and circuses, but their theatres for the presentation of plays, and these plays included formal dramas, as well as spectacular and pantomimic entertainments, which grew more and more debased as Roman civilization lost more and more its ancient iron. With the character of all these plays, however, we are not here concerned. The point merely is that in the Roman world, well into the Christian era, there were theatres quite in the modern sense, there were plays carefully written by artists—some of them powerful artists—and acted by trained, professional actors. For these plays there were everywhere audiences. The Roman world knew the theatre, as we to-day know the theatre, loved it for the pleasures it gave them, supported it in luxury.

And then came the Dark Ages—and the theatre vanished from Europe without leaving a trace. When the drama was reborn in the churches of the Middle Ages, it was a different thing from the drama which had flourished in Greece and Rome. There was no connection whatever between the theatre of the ancient world and the theatre which gradually evolved in mediæval Europe. So far as the latter was concerned, the former might never have existed. An art and an institution which had played so important a part in the life of the Roman world was snuffed out like a candle in the wind. It is one of the many mysterious and incredible things about the Dark Ages, and historians have sought, though so far in vain, to find some link, if ever so tiny, to connect the old-world theatre with the theatre we know.

If the student will turn to the "Confessions of Saint Augustine," Book III, he will find recorded that Saint Augustine came up to Carthage to study in his seventeenth year (371 A. D.) and there, according to his own account, which

perhaps is somewhat exaggerated, after the fashion of saints confessing their early sins, fell into evil ways.

Stage-plays [he says] also carried me away, full of images of my miseries, and of fuel to my fire. Why is it, that man desires to be made sad, beholding doleful and tragical things, which yet himself would by no means suffer? yet he desires as a spectator to feel sorrow at them, and this very sorrow is his pleasure. What is this but a miserable madness? for a man is the more affected with these actions, the less free he is from such affections. Howsoever, when he suffers in his own person, it uses to be styled misery: when he compassionates others, then it is mercy. But what sort of compassion is this for feigned and scenical passions? for the auditor is not called on to relieve, but only to grieve: and he applauds the actor of these fictions the more, the more he grieves. And if the calamities of those persons (whether of old times, or mere fiction) be so acted, that the spectator is not moved to tears, he goes away disgusted and criticising; but if he be moved to passion, he stays intent, and weeps for joy.

Are griefs then too loved? Verily all desire joy. Or whereas no man likes to be miserable, is he yet pleased to be merciful? which because it cannot be without passion, for this reason alone are passions loved? This also springs from that vein of friendship. But whither goes that vein? whither flows it? wherefore runs it into that torrent of pitch bubbling forth those monstrous tides of foul lustfulness into which it willfully changed and transformed, being of its own will precipitated and corrupted from its heavenly clearness? Shall compassion then be put away? by no means. Be griefs then sometimes loved. But beware of uncleanness, O my soul, under the guardianship of my God, the God of our fathers, who is to be praised and exalted above all forever, beware of uncleanness. For I have not now ceased to pity; but then in the theatres I rejoiced with lovers when they wickedly enjoyed one another, although this was imaginary only in the play. And when they lost one another, as if very compassionate, I sorrowed with them, yet had my delight in both. But now I much more pity him that rejoiceth in his wickedness, than him who is thought to suffer hardship, by missing some pernicious pleasure, and the loss of some miserable felicity. This certainly is the truer mercy, but in it grief delights not.

For though he that grieves for the miserable, be commended for his office of charity; yet had he, who is genuinely compassionate, rather there were nothing for him to grieve for. For if good will be ill willed (which can never be), then may he, who truly and sincerely commiserates, wish there might be some miserable, that he might commiserate. Some sorrow may then be allowed, none loved. For thus dost Thou, O Lord God, who lovest souls far more purely than we, and hast more incorruptibly pity on them, yet art wounded with no sorrowfulness. And who is sufficient for these things?

But I, miserable, then loved to grieve, and sought out what to grieve at, when in another's and that feigned and personated misery, that acting best pleased me, and attracted me the most vehemently, which drew tears from me. What marvel that an unhappy sheep, straying from Thy flock, and impatient of Thy keeping, I became infected with a foul disease? And hence the love of griefs; not such as should sink deep into me; for I loved not to suffer, what I loved to look on; but such as upon hearing their fictions should lightly scratch the surface; upon which, as on envenomed nails, followed inflamed swelling, impostumes, and a putrified sore. My life being such, was it life, O my God?

To a historian of the theatre, this passage is extremely significant, not only in showing the prevalence of theatrical representations in those days, their hold on the spectators, and the similarity of effect looked for from the actors, to the effect we look for to-day; but also in showing—because the passage was of course written many years later, following St. Augustine's conversion—the attitude the Christian church was to assume toward the playhouse. No Puritan in the time of Cromwell could be more bitter toward the "foul disease" of play-acting than was St. Augustine in this passage; nor is it the licentious pantomimes of the Roman theatre which he attacks, but quite specifically rather the tragedies. Such a thing as the drama, irrespective of its content, kept the Christian from contemplation of the holy life, it was an indulgence of the flesh, to be rigidly suppressed; though elsewhere, in

his "City of God," St. Augustine does make a distinction between higher and lower forms of drama, and cannot quite bring himself to out-and-out condemnation of the former. In the darkness of barbarism which overwhelmed the Roman empire, amid the inroads of the northern hordes who had never known a theatre, nor any literature, nor art, nor learning, it was the Church of St. Augustine which kept alive what light there was, which alone saved anything of the old culture from the wreck. It did not choose to save the theatre, nor the drama. It chose, rather, deliberately not to. St. Augustine himself might easily have become a dramatist; he became instead a Saint. Both in the Eastern church and the Western, the church authorities were constantly striving to suppress the theatre, often of course against great popular clamor, for the Roman populace loved its rowdy playhouse. Ultimately, with the aid of the Saracen invasions in the East and the barbarian invasions in the West, they completely succeeded. The theatre, and with it the drama, perished from the Western world.

Nearly if not quite the last references to the theatre in Rome are found in the *Variæ* of Cassiodorus, who flourished under the Ostrogothic king, Theodoric, in the early years of the sixth century. These show that while the Roman populace still clamored for—and got—their theatrical entertainment, the barbarian rulers despised them for their tastes, and despised the playhouse. The last reference to a theatre in Rome is in 533. In 568 the Lombards came, from Germany. They were a race still less touched by southern civilization than the Goths. Apparently with their coming the theatre disappeared, to be seen no more for many centuries. It was killed by Christian hostility and barbarian indifference.

How many of the Roman actors, outcasts from their fallen

theatre, "padded the hoof along the roads," as Chambers says, becoming part and parcel of those wandering jugglers, minstrels, and other entertainers of the Middle Ages, nobody of course knows. The Germanic and Celtic barbarians loved to listen to stories; they had folk songs and legends; they were human, and enjoyed any entertainment they could understand. Wandering minstrels became an institution of the Middle Ages, and no doubt the last remnants of the old world theatre were merged into minstrelsy. But even this the sterner church authorities condemned; nor, by any stretch of fancy, can the songs of the minstrels in the mead halls, the performances of tumblers and jugglers, or any other popular entertainment of which we have record during these dark years, be construed as drama, even as theatre, in the sense the Greeks and the Romans knew the terms. The modern European drama, hunt for a connecting link as much as we may, remains a new birth, out of a new age, with no traceable parentage in the past, and had to learn all over, anew, what the classic world had mastered long ago. And, by one of those ironies Fate so loves, it was reborn in the very church which had done so much to crush the developed drama of antiquity. The church crushed the drama because it took people's minds away from holy things, and was a symbol of corruption in a corrupt society. The church brought the drama to life again because it found that the dramatic instinct, deeply rooted in mankind, could be a weapon in the church's hands. The process was probably largely unconscious, largely instinctive. So many generations had passed since Europe had seen a play, so completely forgotten was the ancient world and all its ways, that the drama was reborn at the altars and stations of mediæval cathedrals without, perhaps, anybody being aware of what was happening. The time was

ripe, the instinct was there—and lo! as long, long before in Greece, from some religious rite or procession, so now in France, in Germany, in England, from the celebration of the Mass, sprang the flower of a lovely art, out of devotion came drama.

3

THE FIRST PLAYS IN THE CHURCH

In many respects, probably, the Dark Ages were not so dark as we used to be taught. No doubt they were dark enough for the common man, whose tenure of property, even of life, was none too secure in those turbulent times, who had little or no education, who, in short, was not protected by the stability of an established civilization. But within the monasteries and churches, all over Europe, learning continued to be cherished, and fine craftsmanship, and the love of beauty which goes with fine craftsmanship and must inevitably precede creation in the fine arts. In Anglo-Saxon England the monks were bidden each to master some craft for which he was best fitted, and the result was the production of illuminated manuscripts, gold and silver plate, ecclesiastical ornament, which were the wonder and admiration of the rest of Europe. When William conquered England in 1066, he carried back across the Channel a great quantity of beautifully wrought plate, presenting pieces to all the churches in France, and enabling his nobles, also, to quaff their wine from goblets of silver and gold. This is but one of many records testifying to the richness of ornament in Anglo-Saxon churches, and to the craft skill, hence the artistic instincts, of the Anglo-Saxon monks and those workmen, perhaps, whom they had trained or encouraged. We find, then, in England, before the Conquest, an ecclesiastical organization capable of achievement in the arts, and it need not surprise us, therefore, that in Anglo-Saxon England, as well as in

continental Europe, the drama began anew in the churches. It was not brought to England by any conqueror. It arose there, as elsewhere in Europe (the church at that time was the one international organization, or force, in the world), as a spontaneous development of the liturgical services.

Antiphonal singing, of course, suggests dramatic dialogue. The antiphon was introduced into Italy by St. Ambrose of Milan (who was one of St. Augustine's teachers), and Chambers goes so far as to say that the evolution of the liturgical drama here begins. Obviously, however, true drama was a long time in coming. The Gregorian liturgical texts of the sixth century were not supplemented with additional texts and with processions and pageantry, till the ninth century. It might be as just to say that the drama rather began with the processions and pageants and elaborate vestments of the later church at which the populace stared in some awe and wonder and delight, suggesting to the church authorities a further amplification of the service, and a more mimetic quality to the pageant, in order to instruct as well as impress the worshippers. Toward the end of the ninth century, in various parts of Europe, additional texts, in dialogue form, called tropes, were written, and continued to be written for many years, and were collected into choir books. In the earliest of these tropes, especially in the so-called *Quem quæritis,* used in the Easter service, the modern drama was born. They were, of course, in Latin, like the Mass itself, and hence unintelligible to great numbers, if not the majority, of the worshippers in the church, or would have been unintelligible without the aid of spectacle and pantomime—in other words, theatrical presentation. As chanted in the church, they were acted dialogues, setting forth a story—setting forth, incidentally, one of the most kindling stories in all the world.

Fortunately, we have so full a description of such a presentation that we can reconstruct the scene entire, and actually be present at the birth of the modern drama. In the Concordia Regularis, drawn up by Ethelwold, Bishop of Winchester, some time between 959-79, for the use of the Benedictine monasteries, is a full scenario for the use of those taking part in the *Quem quæritis* ceremony, during the third Nocturn at Matins on Easter morning.

While the third lesson is being chanted, let four brethren vest themselves. Let one of these, vested in an alb, enter as though to take part in the service, and let him approach the sepulchre without attracting attention and sit there quietly with a palm in his hand. While the third respond is chanted, let the remaining three follow, and let them all, vested in copes, bearing in their hands thuribles with incense, and stepping delicately as those who seek something, approach the sepulchre. These things are done in imitation of the angel sitting in the monyment, and the women with spices coming to anoint the body of Jesus. When therefore he who sits there beholds the three approach him like folk lost and seeking something, let him begin in a dulcet voice of medium pitch to sing *Quem quæritis*. And when he has sung it to the end, let the three reply in unison *Ihesu Nazarenum*. So he, *Non est hic, surrexit sicut prædixerat. Ite, nuntiate quia surrexit a mortuis*. At the word of this bidding let those three turn to the choir and say *Alleluia! resurrexit Dominus!* This said, let the one, still sitting there and as if recalling them, say the anthem *Venite et videte locum*. And saying this, let him rise, and lift the veil, and show them the place bare of the cross, but only the cloths laid there in which the cross was wrapped. And when they have seen this, let them set down the thuribles which they bare in that same sepulchre, and take the cloth, and hold it up in the face of the clergy, and as if to demonstrate that the Lord has risen and is no longer wrapped therein, let them sing the anthem *Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro*, and lay the cloth upon the altar. When the anthem is done, let the prior, sharing in their gladness at the triumph of our King, in that, having vanquished death, He rose again, begin the hymn *Te Deum laudamus*. And this begun, all the bells chime out together.

Chambers, from whose invaluable book, "The Mediæval Stage," this translation is taken, says "Dialogued chant and mimetic action have come together, and the first liturgical drama is, in all its essentials, complete."

But that is a very brief and bald statement of a very large fact. There is evident in this scenario a really extraordinary feeling for dramatic effect, that is, for the effect which will kindle emotion in the auditor. The placing of the angel at the sepulchre, the three Marys "stepping delicately" as they approach, are childlike enough; but when the "angel" is ordered to "begin in a dulcet voice of medium pitch" to sing *"Quem quæritis,"* the author is displaying a definite sense of dramatic effect, and the means best calculated to achieve it. The *"Quem quæritis"* of the angel is to float forth sweetly into the church, with that calmness that comes from its quiet pitch, neither too low nor too high, and of course it is to arrest the attention of all the worshippers. The three "women" then speak, telling whom they seek. He answers, telling them the strange, glad tidings. Whereupon they wheel to the choir and chant *"Alleluia! resurrexit Dominus!"* It is, of course, inevitable, as those who devised this scenario quite evidently knew, that such a facing about in unison, and the sudden outburst of *"Alleluia!"* would have a pronounced and stirring effect upon the emotions of all in the church. But the climax is not yet. The "women" are recalled to the sepulchre, the place is definitely shown to be bare, the eye is called on to supplement the ear, and then they take the empty cloth, by way of symbol, and holding it up—a brilliantly conspicuous object in the church, of course, they chant the *"Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro,"* and lay the cloth on the altar, the eyes of all in the congregation held fast. As the cloth is laid on the most sacred spot, the prior suddenly begins, *"Te*

Deum laudamus," and as a climax of jubilation, as the final thrill, somewhere overhead breaks out the peal of the bells—chanting voices, chiming bells, that swell and outburst of jubilant noise which releases to the full at last the emotions of the congregation. Here, a century before the Norman Conquest, we have one principle of drama consciously and cleverly employed—the building to a climax by increased pressure on the emotions, and the final explosion. Not otherwise is the finale of an opera built up, or for that matter a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, or the catastrophe of "Othello."

The good monks who devised the service probably did so in part because they realized that by means of it they could vastly increase the interest of the people in the service, and vastly intensify their emotional reaction to the Easter message. That is plain enough from St. Ethelwold's own words, "Since on this day we celebrate the laying down of the body of our Saviour, if it seem good or pleasing to any to follow on similar lines the use of certain of the religious, which is worthy of imitation for the strengthening of faith in the unlearned vulgar and in neophytes, we have ordered it on this wise." But the whole scenario is too consciously wrought for artistic effect, the climax is too joyously thrilling in its chant of voices and peal of bells, to be the work of men insensible to art. In fact, it can only be the work of men themselves delighting in artistic effects. Sensing the emotional appeal which resides in the Easter story, they deliberately heightened the dramatic effect by the employment of dialogue, pantomime, music, and the final jubilation of bells in the air, combining and ordering these means in that steady progression, that mounting wave motion, so characteristic of dramatic structure. Can we truthfully say, then, that the birth of modern drama was an accident? Or even that it was deliberately brought about by the church as a means of enlightening the

masses, ignorant of Latin, but easily reached by pantomime and theatrical representation? Doubtless the church itself would so have explained its action, and quite honestly. But the first liturgical drama rather belies such a simple explanation. Just as the monks made exquisite illuminated letters, with a realistic record of mediæval men and manners in the tiny pictures surrounding them, for the glory of God—and the love of art; just as they made silver chalices for the glory of God—and the love of fair shapes and bright surfaces; so they created drama, for the glory of God—and the irrepressible love they found in their bosoms for theatrical impersonation and the creation of those emotional delights only the drama can impart.

It must not be supposed that this Easter drama was confined to England. So long as the drama remained liturgical, and was conducted in Latin by the priests and churchmen, it was more or less common to all Europe, it was without nationality. A "sepulchre," often of elaborate material and workmanship, was common to European churches, and the entire ceremony of Holy Week made use of it dramatically, the cross being placed therein, and sometimes guarded by watchers dressed like the Knights of Pilate. This continued to the Reformation, when, naturally, much controversy arose over such customs, and before we leave this topic it is of interest to point out that in England as early as Bishop Hooper's time (he was put to death by Bloody Mary in 1559) there was much Protestant and Puritan scorn of the custom. Such things, of course, smacked of idolatry. In his "Early Writings," Hooper says:

The ploughman, be he never so unlearned, shall better be instructed of Christ's death and passion by the corn that he soweth in the field, and likewise of Christ's resurrection, than by all the dead posts that hang in the church, or are pulled out of the sepulchre with *Christus resurgens*. What resemblance hath the

taking of the cross out of the sepulchre and going a procession with it, with the resurrection of Christ? None at all: the dead post is as dead when they sing *Iam non moritur,* as it was when they buried it with *In pace factus est locus eius.*

Such controversy would be of no importance in a story of English drama, were it not for the fact that the "dead post" (removed on Easter morning from the sepulchre), and the sepulchre itself, and the entire service built up around these symbols, were the very foundation of our drama. In their manipulation were found the emotional thrills which taught the people of the Middle Ages the pleasures of the play. In scorning such symbols, the Puritans were repudiating dramatic art at its fountainhead, though they may have been in part unconscious of that fact. So far back in history does the Puritan hostility to the theatre extend, so blindly is it confused with other issues, supposedly ecclesiastical. When, in our day, some revival preacher paints the playhouse as the carnival of Satan, and all its patrons as candidates for damnation, the lineage of his attack is far older than he knows, and may well be traced as much to Bishop Hooper's despised cult of the "dead post," as to any reasoned conviction he himself may have of the ethical effects of dramatic art. In Hooper's day, certainly, the drama was still close enough to its churchly origin to be identified in men's minds with Rome, rather than Protestantism. Given a race of reformers like the English Puritans, who were none too sensitive to any art, and that was sufficient to cast it out, along with the "idols" of cathedral worship. And that sufficiently explains why there was no theatre in New England until after the Revolutionary War. The Puritan confusion of art with idolatry has been the most serious handicap artistic America has had to contend against. And the end is not yet.

4

TRANSITION FROM CHURCH TO MARKET-SQUARE, AND FROM LATIN TO VERNACULAR

From the vivid description left to us by Ethelwold of the dramatized Easter trope, it is easy to imagine the line of evolution suggested for the drama, so long as it remained within the churches, and under complete ecclesiastical control. Easter was the most important period in the Christian year, as well as the most dramatic, but even thus early Christmas commanded attention, and of course lent itself to pageant interpretation. At the altar could be placed a manger, kings and shepherds could approach through the church doors, the golden crowns and crusted robes of the former, perhaps, giving an air of pomp and importance to the procession. But as the Easter service expanded from a set liturgy into a Passion play, and as the Christmas service developed into a Nativity play, it was but natural that the church dramatists should wish also to show by graphic illustration those events in the history of Man which led up to, and made significant the birth and death of the Saviour; at the least, a Creation play was called for, and an Adam and Eve drama of the Fall. Without the Fall, the Atonement was hardly made sufficiently significant to the beholders. Having progressed to this point, there was nothing to prevent dramatic illustration of almost any event in Scripture, except unwillingness of the priests and clerks to make the necessary effort, and perhaps the limitation of means to devise necessary properties, and

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of numbers to play the parts. And what apparently took place all over Europe was an expansion of dramatized Scripture to take in various Biblical events, from Creation to the Last Judgment, so far as they could find place in the church services.

Beyond this point, the drama could not advance in the church, and to reach this point required two or three centuries. It could not advance because its themes and characters were limited to, or closely allied with the Scriptures, its language was limited to Latin and by the nature of its liturgical origin and continued intent its mood had to be one of reverence, it had to be adapted primarily for effects of worship. In order to develop beyond this extremely limited scope, the drama had to escape from the churches, and in order to develop along naturalistic lines, it had to pass from Latin into the vernacular. There was no essential difference between French, German, and English drama, so long as the church devised and presented it.

It is generally assumed that the drama finally moved out of the churches because it had created so much popular interest, and expanded to take in so many Biblical stories, that the churches could no longer handle the crowds attending the plays, nor could they supply from their staffs enough actors to fill the parts. Doubtless both causes were operative, but historians of the drama have probably neglected sufficiently to realize that the secularization of the drama and its removal from the church came during the period when other things as well were passing out of the church, such as the art-crafts; when the Dark Ages were flowering into that Gothic period modern historians are coming to study with a juster appreciation of its value; when around the sky-borne cathedrals urban centres were forming where civilization could be stabilized,

and men and women began to have intellectual interests and curiosities which demanded satisfaction. National languages were taking form, too, and national consciousness. Even while the drama remained in the churches, touches of the vernacular crept into it, in various parts of Europe. But that wasn't enough. The church had created something larger, more potent, than it knew, something which swelled to burst the bounds of an alien tongue and a strict conformation to religious service. The people wanted the drama, wanted to take it to their bosoms not only as worship and religious instruction, but as intimate entertainment, as a means of creative self-expression. The form and theme were prepared for them in the Scriptural plays evolved by the church. All that was necessary was to take this drama out of the church, translate it into the vernacular, substitute men and women of the community as actors, in place of the priests and clerks, and there was a folk theatre, ready made. How far the church aided in this process, glad perhaps to be rid of the excessive burden of providing the masses with their drama, or how far it attempted for a time still to keep the drama under its control, providing the necessary translations into the vernacular, the chief actors and (as we would now say) stage directors, no doubt cannot be definitely answered; probably the reaction of the church varied in various places, and the entire process of secularization required many years, roughly from 1100 A. D., say, to 1300 A. D.

There are many records of outdoor performances during this transitional period, especially of an Adam play in France, which show clearly the early methods of outdoor presentation, and the continued close association with the church. In this Adam play, which contained dialogue in Norman French, as well as Latin chants from the church, "Paradise" was made

"in a raised spot" evidently near the door of the church, and was surrounded by a cloth which screened from view all but the heads and shoulders of the actors. In Paradise were set trees, with fruit, and flowers as well, and Adam and Eve, finely dressed, were led therein by the Lord. After the Lord instructs Adam and Eve, he departs into the church, and Adam and Eve walk about Paradise, admiring it. Meanwhile, from another part of the stage, representing the doors of Hell, demons appear, and prance about, followed by Satan himself, who approaches Paradise and tries to persuade Eve to eat the fruit therein. He fails with her, and also he fails to tempt Adam, whereupon he sadly retreats and holds converse with the other demons at the doors of Hell. Fortified by this conference, Satan first makes a sally out among the audience, and then returns to the attack on Adam and Eve. At this point there is a bit of dialogue which is not without characterizing insight. Satan tells Eve the fruit will give them marvellous strength, but she interrupts.

"How does it taste?" she asks.

"Heavenly," says Satan.

"Is the fruit thus?"

"Indeed it is."

"The mere look of it is pleasant," says the tempted Eve, and at this ripe moment an artificial serpent is made to rise by the tree (evidently by somebody hidden below the guarding drapery), Eve listens to it, eats, and gives Adam to eat. As soon as he has eaten, Adam recognizes his sin, stoops down out of sight behind the screen, and puts on a miserable garment of fig leaves. The Lord returns, Adam and Eve shrink before him, and he drives them forth from Paradise, and sets an angel with a sword to guard the gate.

Adam and Eve are now evidently either on the church step

or more likely the bare ground, between Paradise and Hell mouth, and with hoe and spade they pretend to till and plant corn. Weary with toil, they sit down to rest, gazing longingly at Paradise and beating their breasts. Then the Devil comes and plants "thorns and thistles in their tillage." Seeing the thorns, they bewail their lot still more, "beating their breasts and thighs and betraying grief by their gestures." And Adam begins a lament. Again comes Satan, with assistant devils, puts Adam and Eve in chains, and drags them off to Hell, where the other devils grab them at the doors, and then cause a great smoke to arise, and "call to each other with glee in their Hell, and clash their pots and kettles, that they may be heard without."

It is plain from this scenario that the Biblical story was closely followed, that the play was simple in setting, and that its purpose obviously was to illustrate the fall of Man, and hence the subsequent need for atonement. Evidently the play was conducted as much by pantomime as by dialogue, and there is nothing to indicate that all the parts were not played by the priests and clerks. Yet a distinct difference can be felt between this play and the Easter trope described by Ethelwold. However solemnly the Lord may conduct Adam and Eve into the garden, and chants come forth from the church, the garden is not the cathedral altar—it is a piece of stage scenery. The beholders then (even as you reading of it to-day) must have been curious about the way the effects were arranged, pleased with the *make-believe* of it. It was, in other words, art as well as religion. Again, when the prancing demons appeared, it is pretty certain that they cut capers, and that when Satan pointed out the apple to Eve, there was perhaps an element of grotesquery in it, just as there was in the gargoyles aloft above his head. Somebody in the watch-

ing crowd laughed, surely, when Eve, womanlike, asked how the fruit tasted. And when Satan and the demons made their "sally amongst the people" perhaps they grimaced, or even clutched at a woman, or a girl, and there was a nervous scream, or at any rate a little squeal of half-laughter. Again, when Satan planted the thistles in place of Adam's grain, there must have been a good deal of curiosity on the part of the spectators, either to see how he represented this episode in pantomime, or to watch him erect a bunch of real thistles, if—as is possible—he employed a "property." In either case, the attitude of the spectators was here not exactly that of worship. Finally, when the devils carried off Adam and Eve to Hell, again there were doubtless capers cut, and the smoke and clash of "pots and kettles" which ensued were realistic devices far different from the anthem and peal of bells which concluded the Easter play within the church. It is, of course, dangerous to draw conclusions from the effect such a scene would have on us now. Possibly the mediæval crowd were awed by the smoke, thrilled by the racket. But from what we know of the temper of the Middle Ages, from the "Feast of Fools" long a custom within the church (to the scandal of many good ecclesiastics), from the later development of the Devil frequently into a comic character of the mystery plays, we are probably safe in assuming that the actors here playing demons (whether they were churchmen or laymen) clashed their pots and kettles with a rare good will, "called aloud to each other in glee" with all manner of outlandish sounds, and created for the audience something not quite to be described as awe and horror for the fate of Adam and Eve, but rather more akin to your delight and mine in a good melodrama to-day. Such capers and such effects would hardly have been possible as a part of the church service, within the

church. The crude realism of setting made possible by the out-of-doors, the quite different mood unconsciously induced by a shift in emphasis from worship to make-believe, the injection of humor, and the intimate dialogue in the vernacular, were all important elements in the evolution of the drama. The capering devils, as they sally amongst the people, and as they speak the language of the people, at once establish a bond of intimacy with the audience, take them more fully into the play, remove it one more step, and that almost the final one, out of the church, into the theatre, using the word "theatre," of course, in a very general sense.

When once the series of Biblical episodes dramatized by the church and made familiar by many repetitions to the people, had moved outside of the churches, had been supplied with dialogue in the vernacular instead of in Latin (and dialogue much more extensive than the brief Latin texts), when they had lost the reverential emotional quality inherent in the church vaults, the chants, the mood of worship in a holy place, and finally when they had been turned over to laymen to act, the drama was confronted with a whole new set of problems, and started on a fresh development. The fact that it was still concerned entirely with the same Biblical subject matter does not alter this statement. Moreover, these problems were often different in different lands, and the same ones were differently met by different peoples. National drama, instead of international church drama, began.

The annual performances of the mysteries chiefly took place at the Corpus Christi festival, a festival decreed by Urban IV in 1264 to fall on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, and made fully operative by the Council of Vienna in 1311. The mystery or miracle plays (the two terms are largely interchangeable, though the former were supposed to

deal with strictly Biblical themes, and the latter term was supposed to cover rather the religious plays based on lives of the Saints; meticulous differentiation, however, only makes for confusion) were, of course, the secularized versions of the church dramas, expanded and developed by the people, and since the people could not well spread them out over the year, as the church could, they were concentrated into cycles, and presented one after the other, on a stated holiday. Thus, between dawn and dusk, on one long day, the mediæval folk could see, perhaps, the whole pageant of sacred history from Creation to the Last Judgment unrolled before them. Perhaps —but not, probably, often, because there were so many of these plays in the more famous cycles that they could not all be acted in one day. Sometimes it took two or more days. Sometimes a section of the cycle was acted one year, another section the next year. But, whatever the method, the secularized mystery plays did concentrate the developed liturgical drama into a cycle which gave it greater unity, and by sheer mass alone added vastly to its importance as art.

From now on we are concerned here only with the course taken by English drama, and England met the problem of a stage for the plays, and the problem of securing actors and financing the productions, in its own way, and probably the way it chose had no little to do with subsequent developments. The English way had much to commend it, for it was grounded in simplicity and common sense. The result, during the next two centuries and more, was a less highly developed technique of stagecraft in England than in France, where the mysteries reached their greatest estate, and a less highly developed literary technique as well. Few of the English mystery plays are comparable with the best French dramas either in dramatic force and subtlety, or in poetic

skill. They remained more primitive, under their simpler methods of presentation and humbler authorship. But because of that very fact, perhaps, they held back the English stage on a folk level that made possible its flowering under Elizabeth as a free, lawless, indigenous thing, unfettered by a developed formalism which would have made Shakespeare less than the glory he is.

The English people, in a quite extraordinary number of towns, even small towns, put the presentation of the mystery cycles into the hands of the various trade guilds, making each guild responsible for the entire financing, staging and acting of its particular play. Elsewhere in Europe, where such cycles were elaborately developed, the municipalities took the matter in hand, something as a town to-day will get together to present a pageant. Cities tried to outdo each other, expenses ran up and up, the crowds demanded ever more elaborate settings and spectacular effects. Months were consumed in preparation. As much effort was lavished on the plays as on the building of a church, a stage had to be erected in the town square containing a large number of "stations" or individual sets—all that would be required for as many plays as were to be given in a stated day, with Heaven at one end of the stage, Hell mouth (a great dragon's open jaws) at the other, and, between, the other needed scenery. These "stations"—houses, the three crosses, and the like—grew more and more elaborate. The plays often extended to great lengths, actors having to learn as many as 2500 lines. The tendency was away from simplicity, and toward a formal stage and elaborated drama, with the religious element slipping away.

In England, on the other hand, though there were probably a number of such all-embracing stages (though less elab-

orated), the national contribution was to present the separate plays on separate stages, each stage being nothing at all but what we to-day call a "float," and the English called a "pageant." Each stage, or pageant, was apparently often built in two stories, and mounted on wheels. The lower story was screened off, and served as a dressing and retiring room for the actors. On top of it was the real stage, thus elevated enough above the ground to afford anybody on the street a chance to see the play. On the morning when the cycle was to be presented, each guild, with its stage all set, its actors dressed and ready, brought its pageant wagon to the designated starting point. Then the first pageant, which showed the Creation and Fall of Lucifer (in the great York cycle entrusted to the Barkers—i.e. a guild of tannery workers) was trundled to the first presentation point (perhaps in front of the church), the actors came up from the lower room, and began the play. When they finished, their pageant was hauled down the street to the next presentation point, and the second pageant wagon arrived at the first point, and began *its* play. Thus, after three or four hours, a dozen plays would be going on simultaneously in various parts of the town. To see the whole cycle for the day, it was not necessary for everybody to pack into one place. You could choose your station, remain there, and see one play after another in proper sequence. If you were well-to-do, you could pay a fee to have the street right under your own windows designated as a playing station. By giving each separate play to a trade guild, and of course the guild best fitted to stage it effectively and at least expense (as the ship carpenters the building of Noah's Ark, the goldsmiths the Adoration, etc.), the municipality as a whole did not plunge into expense at all; and the individual guilds could be trusted, no doubt, to keep within bounds, as

they had to foot the bills! By playing on movable wagons, instead of presenting all the plays, in sequence, on one great stage, no elaborate provisions had to be made for seating a vast audience in one place, and, of course, on a wagon wheeled through the ill-paved streets of mediæval England no great elaboration of stage setting for the individual "pageants" was possible. Each set remained perforce small, simple, almost as primitive as a float in an American 4th of July parade. The only chance for much elaboration was in the costuming, but even here the numerous guild records show that the expenses were not excessive, though the costumes were bright, even perhaps a little gaudy, like church imagery.

The authors of the plays are for the most part unknown. At first they may have been clerics, but in the cycles preserved to us it is fairly evident that the texts grew from year to year, and that in some towns there were certain men—quite naturally—of greater inherent dramatic ability than in others, who put their stamp on more than one drama of the town cycle. The actors were paid for their services, but they were in no sense professionals. They were true amateurs; carpenters, butchers, goldsmiths 364 days in the year, and actors by—and for—the grace of God on the 365th. One actor received three shillings, fourpence, for playing God, another got fourpence for hanging Judas, and a like amount for crowing like a cock. Two "worms of conscience" divided sixteen pence, and Noah got a shilling, but his wife only eightpence. How much they rehearsed, we do not know, but as the plays were often of considerable length, as they were written in verse which had to be carefully declaimed so that the crowds on the street below could hear it all, and as the action frequently called for rather elaborate "business," involving sometimes a descent from the pageant wagon to the

ground beside it, the plays could hardly have been given without considerable rehearsing. Besides, the rivalry was keen between the various guilds, the players were acting before their fellow townsmen, and, finally, the play was for them an expression of devotion as well as an opportunity for artistic creation. They undoubtedly worked hard and faithfully to make their simple little dramas as effective as they could.

We may now consider with some care a specimen or two of the English mystery plays, thus presented by humble amateur actors, on a crude little stage on wheels, before a gaping, holiday crowd who packed the streets and hung out of the windows, to enjoy their annual theatrical feast.

5

THE BROME ABRAHAM AND ISAAC, AND THE SECOND SHEPHERDS' PLAY

Let us take for first consideration the Brome * "Abraham and Isaac," which exists in a text supposted to date from about 1470, and which has appealed to all latter day students of the stage as one of the more effective of the English mysteries. It is better, perhaps, to read this text in the original spelling, if that can be done without too great confusion and difficulty, for like Chaucer it loses something precious when translated into modern English, even if there is considerably less to lose. The dramatic structure is not affected, however, which is what we are chiefly to consider. As a first step, it is necessary to reread the twenty-second chapter of Genesis, in order to have clearly in mind exactly how much help the mediæval dramatist had in the Scriptures. Obviously, it was very little, nothing more than a bare situation. All dialogue had to be supplied by the dramatist, and if the play were to run more than five minutes, the emotional situation had somehow to be developed, expanded, and suspense created, from the mere hint afforded in the Bible. As a matter of fact, those

* The bulk of English mystery plays have come down to us in the manuscripts of four cycles, evidently employed in four different places: the Chester cycle; the York cycle, which is the fullest, containing forty-eight complete plays and a fragment; the "Townley" or Wakefield cycle; and the Coventry cycle. There have been preserved, besides, many isolated plays from other places. None of these plays has a known author, and there were probably many borrowings between the various cycles. A complete list of the York plays will be found in Nicoll's "British Drama," with the trade guild assigned to the production of each one. (Page 30.)

commentators who speak slightingly of the mediæval drama fail sometimes to realize the genuine difficulties presented by the subject matter, as well as by the restricted stage. If a modern dramatist, to-day, were called upon to make a twenty minute play about Abraham and Isaac, to be enacted on a pageant wagon stage, he would not find the task an easy one, and he would probably end with increased respect for the unknown author of the Brome text.

The object of this dramatist, of course, was primarily to present Abraham's action in a favorable light, to teach the beholders (as the epilogue shows) that submission to the Lord's will is a commendable thing. Even had it occurred to him to do so, he could not depict Abraham in revolt, as a modern dramatist might, nor little Isaac as rebellious against his fate. Any emotional struggle against the Divine decree was reduced, for him, to a minimum, and hence his opportunity for drama by so much diminished. He had to extract what emotion he could from the natural pathos of the situation, and by very limited means prolong his story to its climax, the "happy ending" when the angel catches the uplifted sword. These things considered, his success was considerable, and his work shows many indications of a real grasp of dramatic principles.

The exposition is naïve and simple. Abraham and Isaac appear on the pageant stage (let us imagine this play on a wagon) which is evidently built up at one end to suggest a hill. Abraham speaks, addressing the Lord in stanza one, and thus establishing his devoutness. In stanza two he calls himself by name, thus establishing his identity to the audience. In stanza three he calls Isaac by name, establishing *his* identity—

"As my own sweet son, my Isaac here."

The line is quaintly clumsy, but it does the work! Then he tells of his great affection for Isaac, and prays,

"That never affliction nor terror may
Come to my child in any place."

Isaac, in a few words, indicates what an obedient little boy he is, and the play is all set to go on; we, the audience, know who is who, and something about their attitude toward each other, and life in general.

Now the voice of God speaks (perhaps coming from a player concealed in the lower part of the pageant), telling the angel to go order Abraham to sacrifice his son. The angel goes to Abraham, who instantly assents, although he does express some grief at the command. This too ready assent seems to us extremely naïve, as if the dramatist were missing his opportunity for emotional expression; but it must be remembered that the author felt the necessity of following Scripture, and preaching the lesson of obedience. It is not till the angel has departed, and Abraham goes to get his dear son, that the natural emotions of the father are given some outlet.

Here the play makes use of a favorite device of dramatists, and makes use of it with good effect—the device of repetition. Three times, before he divines his fate, Isaac speaks, and each time Abraham cries out to God that the child's words almost break his heart. Then the boy suspects something—

"Bear ye your sword thus drawn for me?"—

and twice more Abraham cries out his grief. Each repetition adds something to the burden of sorrow, and builds up to the final revelation, couched in language of dramatic simplicity—

"Ah, Isaac, Isaac, I must kill thee!"

The way the play develops to this stabbing outcry, with alternate childish prattle from Isaac and reiterated lament from Abraham, is technically effective, as effective to-day as it ever was, for it is sound construction. Shortly after the outcry, the dramatist introduces a note not found at all in the Biblical story, when little Isaac exclaims,

"I would to God my mother were here on this hill——"

In the audience, no doubt, were as many mothers as fathers, and, besides, what is so natural as for a small boy, terrified, to cry for his mother? Having done his duty at the start in depicting Isaac's sweetly obedient disposition, the dramatist forgot his didactic purpose for a moment, considered Isaac as a real little boy, and put in a touch of nature which no doubt profoundly affected the women in his audience. To be sure, he immediately repents, and Isaac expresses complete submission to Divine decree, at some length, and in terms hardly childlike. But presently he gets back to reality, when the poor little fellow cries out,

"Now truly father all this tarrying,
It doeth my heart but harm.
I pray you father, make an ending."

There is something genuinely poignant about that outcry, even if it strikes us as unchildlike in expression. The dramatist now contrives, by the device of hiding the boy's face with a cloth so that he cannot see, but waits in torture for the stroke, and then by postponing the stroke while Abraham laments,

"O, Father in Heaven, what shall I do?"

to postpone still further the climax, to rouse the spectators to a still greater pitch of expectation. Here, again, is excellent dramatic construction. Then comes the happy climax,

the staying of Abraham's uplifted arm. Instantly the play assumes a different tone, with Abraham's glad,

"Arise up, sweet child, and come to me!"

and the pretty interlude when Isaac runs across the stage and leads back the sheep—no doubt a real one. There is a touch of genuine and unforced pathos when the child, stooping to blow the fire, exclaims,

"But father, if I stoop down low,
Ye will not kill me with your sword, I trow?"

and again when he says,

"I had never such good will to go home
And to speak with my dear mother!"

We can almost fancy the women among the spectators wiping their eyes, and saying, to each other, "The poor little thing!"

A moment later father and son leave the stage, and the "Doctor" appears to point the moral of the tale. Then the pageant moves on up the street, leaving the spectators rather more impressed, we may well imagine, with the pathos of the story than with the conviction that it was their duty to sacrifice *their* sons, should the Lord will it. In spite of the naïve didacticism of this play, there is in it, unquestionably, genuine feeling alike for a father's grief and a little child's terror, genuine tenderness and sympathy. Building up suspense from very scanty material, the dramatist kept his story alive and progressive, and created an emotion of tenderness for childhood which we to-day can feel, even if we cannot feel, as his audiences perhaps could, the other emotion he sought to convey, of pleasure at the sight of submission. In short, there is a real sense for dramatic effect here, no little skill in planning that effect, and the charm of sincerity.

Another play equally famous—perhaps more famous—is the Second Shepherds' play in the Townley cycle. The manuscript of this cycle dates from the second half of the fifteenth century, or not long before America was discovered. As several plays in it are among the best of all the English mysteries, it is assumed that probably at or not long before this period some local dramatist of real ability rewrote them. But he was not, in any sense, a "professional" dramatist, and his ability was no doubt unconscious. It consisted in writing with at least one eye not on the Bible, but upon the English life about him. His importance lay in the fact that he moved the drama another step forward toward greater freedom of subject and treatment. In the Second Shepherds' play, indeed, he wrote with very nearly all of two eyes on the life about him, and the Scriptures entered so slightly into his calculations that the play is, in reality, not a mystery play at all, but an early English pastoral farce, with a charm, a freshness, a gay humor about it that still captivates us across the centuries.

Several things will at once strike the reader of this play. First, perhaps, that it is written in an artificial stanza form, with four rather long rhymed lines in succession, then a short line break, then three rapid rhymed lines, then a short tag line, rhymed with the internal short line—a,a,a,a—b—ccc—b. The effect, when read aloud, is of decided conversational speed. This verse has its distinct advantages for a humorous piece, as is apparent when the stanzas are broken up among one or more speakers. The effect, of course, is to speed up the action. The Noah play, in the same cycle, also full of humor, employs the same stanza form. There may well have been a definite consciousness of his literary medium on the part of the dramatist. Secondly, the reader will sense immediately that the play does not open on a religious note, does

not make the slightest effort to put the spectators into a reverent mood, or to give them any sense whatever of Palestine or the impending sacred birth. Instead, it introduces first an English shepherd, who bewails to a probably sympathetic crowd in the street below that the poor farmer folk are downtrodden (the complaint isn't new!), and then a second shepherd who advises the men in the street below not to get married, thus cracking a joke which, like the farmer's complaint, is going yet. Soon a third shepherd enters, evidently younger than the others, and the first two proceed to pick on him—which is undoubtedly human. He, however, is good-natured, and always ready to counter with a proverb, of which he has a large store, and of which he is very proud. But presently all three get together in a bit of close harmony, to cheer themselves (and the audience) up. It would be interesting to have the words and music of this song. Then enters a fourth character, sharply enough differentiated to show that the dramatist had a sense for character delineation—one *Mak,* a sly rogue with a reputation for sheep stealing. He puts on a bit of swank, but doesn't get away with it, so he begins to whine a little about his health. At this point, the first shepherd asks him how his wife is.

Now, *Mak's* reply to this question should be carefully noted, because it indicates clearly that the dramatist understood the need of "planting" a point, as we should say nowadays. The question was asked not only that the audience might have *Mak's* wife in mind, since she was to play a large part in the later story, but so that *Mak* might complain of how each year,

> ". . . there'll a day be
> She brings forth a baby
> And some years two."

Having "planted" in the minds of the shepherds the idea of his wife's annual contribution to the population, *Mak* unwittingly—but by the author's connivance—makes the subsequent situation more plausible, and also prepares the audience for it.

The crafty *Mak,* though the shepherds make him lie down between them, doesn't go to sleep as they do. He waits a moment till they are slumbering, then gets up, steals a sheep, and carries it home. His wife, who is as crafty as he, but with a sharper tongue, fears pursuit, so devises the ingenious plan of putting the sheep in the cradle, and taking to her bed herself, where she will complain of labor pains if the shepherds come, thus hoping to send them away. *Mak* sneaks back and lies down again between the shepherds, where they find him when they wake. The third shepherd has dreamed *Mak* stole a sheep, but the rest scout the idea—how could he have done so? "Not once did he stir," says the first—a surefire bit of humor on the stage, always, when somebody who has slept profoundly is positive he knew all the time what was going on! In fact, it isn't confined to the stage. *Mak* here makes another "plant." He has dreamed, he says, his wife was in labor. The shrewd fellow is preparing the ground if the shepherds come to his house. Then he sarcastically bids the shepherds to "look in his sleeve" to see that he hasn't taken anything, and the third shepherd, sure that he has, but without proof, angrily kicks him out.

Mak hurries home, has a spat with his wife, and then they put the swaddled sheep in the cradle, *Mak* tucks his wife into her bed, and sits down by the cradle prepared to sing the "baby" to sleep. Meanwhile, of course, the shepherds have discovered their loss, and hasten to *Mak's* house. He hears them coming, and begins to sing a lullaby at the top of his

lungs, while his wife "groans in concert." The situation is absurd, but indubitably ludicrous, and probably was greeted by the audience with howls of laughter, which rose again when one shepherd said,

"—List our sire there croon!"

and another replied,

"Never heard I voice break so clear out of tune."

The shepherds enter the house, they see no sign of the sheep, *Mak* is obsequiously hospitable (though the plates on the table are empty), and *Gill,* his wife, moans and complains in her mock pain. All is working well. The shepherds, defeated, go away. The audience, who have waited on the *qui vive* to see how soon the shepherds will discover the deception, don't know quite what to make of this. Is *Mak* really going to get away with the cheat? But no! Outside, the shepherds remember they gave no present to the baby in the cradle. Back they go, in the kindness of their hearts, the third shepherd leading the way, a bit repentant because of his suspicions. He wants to peep at the babe. *Mak* tries in vain to find excuses to prevent this catastrophe.

"Give me leave him to kiss, and lift up the clout.
What the devil is this?—He has a long snout!"

Say what you like, that is a good couplet. It is quick, it is revealing, and it has humor. It is the couplet of an author who sensed how to write farce. There is a little more fun, as *Mak* and his wife try to lie out of the situation, and then the shepherds punish *Mak* (and delight the crowd) by tossing him in a canvas sheet. (The actor who played *Mak* had no sinecure!) Then they go out again to the "moor."

Up to this point, there has been no indication whatever of

a Nativity play, of anything religious. It seems almost an afterthought on the author's part that suddenly an angel appears unto the three shepherds, chanting *"Gloria in excelsis,"* and telling them to go to Bethlehem. His song interests them, as music, and they proceed to try it over themselves, not without some humor. They are still in character with the early portion of the play. They only step out of character, in fact, for some thirty lines, when they declaim with a ludicrous display of learning how Isaiah predicted this occasion. Then they march in a couple of steps from England to Bethlehem, and each one makes a little speech to the Babe, and hands Him a present. Those three little speeches are wholly charming; they are touched with poetry, they are in character with simple, good-natured shepherds, and the gifts are quaint and humorous. The first shepherd ends his speech—

> "Here's my promised greeting—
> Have a bob of cherries!"

The second brings a bird, and concludes—

> "I fain would drink in thy cup,
> Little day-star!"

And the third, the youngest shepherd, gives the Child—a tennis ball!

The Virgin replies to them briefly—and her words, oddly, have neither poetry nor any dramatic effect; they are a conventional tag to the play. The three shepherds rise, the third saying,

> "Come forth to sing are we bound.
> Make it ring them aloft!"
>
> (*They depart singing.*)

The play is over, with the emphasis at the end still on the shepherds, and their voices echoing in a song. It was they,

as fellow citizens in Merrie England, who interested the author. He put them through a humorous adventure with very considerable skill in the ordering of the plot, and if his play had stopped when they departed from *Mak's* house, it would be a complete little work of art. It wasn't his fault that he had to drag them off to Bethlehem, with birds and cherries for gifts at a season when they had just been complaining of the cold and snow! For a moment, to be sure, the sentiment of the Nativity, the sight of his three characters kneeling before the manger, kindled this author into tender and smiling poetry, but it escaped again when the Virgin said the proper thing, and he sent his three shepherds off at the close singing, it is to be feared, their fifteenth century equivalent of a barber-shop chord.

It is necessary now to consider briefly how this farce was put on the stage. If we assume that it was acted on a pageant wagon, as the evidence seems to indicate, we have to imagine a wagon stage long enough to represent the "moors," and at any rate *Mak's* house, with a bed and a cradle in it, and possibly a table containing two empty plates or bowls. It would be possible, of course, to use the same house for the stable where the Christ child lay, by removing the first set of properties. But the stage directions do not indicate this. They seem to indicate a second structure at the opposite end of the wagon. Inasmuch as four men had to lie down together on the "moors" which would require at least eight feet of space, and as *Mak's* house had to contain five people, as well as a bed and a cradle, and the stable had to hold four people, as well as the manger, the wagon stage could hardly have been less than twenty feet long, and for any freedom of action should have been nearer thirty. The house and stable, of course, were open on all sides, so the crowds on the streets

could see in. Probably they were little more than symbolic canopies of thatch. But even so the pageant must have been of considerable size and weight to trundle through the streets. Yet, in spite of its size, it was a tiny and restricted space to represent the moors, an Englishman's cottage, and the stable in Bethlehem all at once. The shepherds, while *Mak* was hurrying home, might conceivably descend from the wagon to the street, and pretend to hunt for their sheep there, thus extending a trifle the limits of the stage; but at best the moor was huddled against the cottage, the cottage was but a step from the stable, and all sense of distance (all lapses of time, also, for lack of a curtain) had to be supplied by the imaginations of the audience. The play, in that respect, was almost as primitive as a children's game of "make believe." The English audiences who stood in the street below, watching it unfold, were not only learning to enjoy a drama that had little religious significance, taught no spiritual lesson, but merely created a joyous story out of the life about them; but they were learning to enjoy such a story with the slightest of help from the physical stage; with the fewest guideposts to illusion they were finding their way through a plot of some intricacy, which moved the scene from place to place, and covered a supposed span of time much in excess of the playing time. The growing interest of English writers in realism (as we would call it to-day), of drama about their own day and people, created for its own sake, not for didactic purposes; their growing ability to assemble such drama effectively; and finally the training of English audiences in following a story with understanding and enjoyment with the minimum of help from the physical stage—these are the significant things to note in the charming farce of the three shepherds. Both the dominant interest of the playwrights, as

here displayed, and the imaginative flexibility of the audiences, as here indicated, were to remain characteristic of the English theatre through the exciting years of the Renaissance.

6

MORALITIES

The first step in the development of English drama as an independent art was the presentation of the mystery plays outside the churches, in the vernacular, by lay actors. The next step was the introduction into those plays of humor and realism, drawn not from Bible story but from contemporary observation. A third step—which, however, may have been coincident with the second in many places, both in England and on the continent, was the creation of a type of play known as a moral play or morality. The morality plays were peopled not by Biblical characters, but by allegorical figures representing virtues and vices, and their intent was not to teach graphically the Scriptures and the basis of Christian faith, but to teach ethical lessons, to establish ideals of conduct. The first mention of such plays in England occurs in 1378, when at York were presented what were called Paternoster plays, but which were quite evidently moralities in which "the vices were held up to scorn and the virtues praised." During the century which followed there was evidently a considerable development in this type of drama, and indications of its extensive popularity.

The reader of these moralities to-day will at first wonder a little, perhaps, at the statement that they mark an advance in the drama. Most of them seem to us now platitudinous and dull, and deficient in dramatic movement and color. Instead of being peopled with such interesting folk as the Townley

shepherds, or Mr. and Mrs. Noah, or Adam and Eve, or the thrilling figures from the New Testament, they are peopled with mere allegories of the vices and virtues and generally with a central figure representing Mankind, for the possession of whose soul the vices and virtues contend. Even those moralities which had a humorous slant (and several that have come down to us had) lack the definite, sharp outline imparted to the mystery plays by the employment of definite, individual characters. We to-day, being so accustomed to look for definite sharp characters in our drama, are a bit bewildered, and a bit bored, by most of the moralities. They seem not nearer to our complex theatre than the mysteries, but farther away.

But we must consider, first, the mediæval mind, not our own. In the century or more that produced and developed the moralities, Europe was under the spell of "The Romance of the Rose" and similar examples of allegorical literature. Allegory was alike more heartily enjoyed and more easily grasped by the mediæval mind; it brought a satisfaction perhaps but little understood by us. Moreover, during this same period, as both the literature and the art of Europe attest, the mediæval mind was curiously fascinated by the idea of death. All those macabre engravings of the Dance of Death, which have come down to us by the score, might almost be illustrations for many of the morality plays, wherein Man is summoned to his last accounting, or Death is seen to be one visitor who makes no distinction between prince and peasant, pope and emperor and clown. As a later poet put it:

> Sceptre and crown
> Must tumble down
> And in the dust be equal made
> With the poor crooked scythe and spade.

Such a realization did not begin, nor end, with the Middle Ages, but it seems peculiarly to have obsessed the mediæval mind. Hence the allegory and the preoccupation with death and judgment, found in the moralities, was a genuine symptom of the age, and denoted a growing correspondence between the drama and life, just as the preoccupation with social themes in the plays of Ibsen or Shaw denotes a correspondence between drama and life in our era of social consciousness.

Above all, however, the moralities marked a forward step because, even though their characters were abstractions, not individuals, they were chosen by the dramatist, not dictated by the Scriptural story, and their ordering in the play was left entirely to his devising. The author of a morality was, in other words, thrown entirely on his own devices, both to invent characters and to evolve a plot. These authors didn't get very far, to be sure, sticking close to what we may call the standard virtues and vices, and always, of course, causing the former to triumph. But they did, even in this limited freedom, learn something of self-reliance as playwrights, and they did come definitely to grapple with one immensely important element of dramatic structure; they had, from the nature of their theme, to depict a struggle in the soul of man. Now, if you will recall that the very essence of "Hamlet" is a struggle within the soul of man; that the very essence of "Macbeth" is a struggle within the soul of that tortured warrior; that scores upon scores of the world's great dramas down to our own day have secured their emotional interest by depicting the combat of forces in the soul of the hero, you will realize that the authors of the moralities, trying to make a play out of the contest between vice and virtue for the soul of man, were embarked on a problem that Shakespeare had

to face, and Eugene O'Neill. And, if they were to succeed in making their play interesting to their audiences, they had to find some technical solution for this problem, so the audiences would be emotionally aroused. Little or nothing in the mystery plays called for so much originality of invention, and hence the development of the moralities marked a forward step in English drama.

The most famous morality in our language is "Everyman." It is also the best from a literary standpoint and, so far as we can judge, the most effective on the stage. Because, however, there is some question whether it is translated from a Dutch original (instead of the other way around), many collections of English drama do not include it. But whether it followed or preceded the continental morality really makes little or no difference, since the version we know, dating from the latter part of the fifteenth century, was written in English, widely acted in England, and must have had quite as much effect on English dramatists as though it were surely an original work. The influence of Ibsen on the technique of modern English dramatists is not less because he was a Norwegian. Moreover, "Everyman" has been acted, both in England and America, during the twentieth century, and many have had the opportunity to study it in performance. Finally, though it does not illustrate at all the humor developed by some of the moralities, it illustrates better than any other the first successful handling of the problem of representing a soul struggle on the stage. Therefore it seems easily the best of the moralities to study in some detail.

When "Everyman" was presented by the Ben Greet players in Mendelssohn Hall, New York, in 1903, with Edith Wynne Matthison as *Everyman,* it made a profound impression on nearly all who witnessed it. These were not, to be sure, at

first any too numerous. The late William Winter, then dramatic critic of *The Tribune,* was extremely scornful of the revival, and many shared his attitude. The play was enacted on practically the bare platform of the hall, possibly with even less scenic accessories than were customary on the mediæval stage. God spoke from behind the organ pipes, there was no front curtain, and no concentration of light on the players. I well remember the pain of a certain press agent, whose duty it was to secure publicity for this production as well as for a musical comedy playing nearby, when he found the first audiences at "Everyman" bewildered and unresponsive. He stood at the back of the theatre where the musical comedy was in full swing, and observed the crowd applaud a silly song by the soubrette. "Listen to that!" he exclaimed. "And I've just come from 'Everyman' at Mendelssohn Hall, where the voice of God Almighty didn't get a hand!"

But the indifference to "Everyman" and Miss Matthison's acting was soon broken down, even if the voice of God continued without applause, and ultimately the production was shown in many cities with great success, where it laid its grave, quiet, sombre spell on all beholders and showed them how much emotional response can be evoked by simple means, on a bare stage, even in our complex age. The power of this play over the mediæval audiences must, therefore, have been very great, assuming anything like Miss Matthison's acting ability.

For, to a degree far in excess of the previous plays we have considered, "Everyman" depends for its effect upon the actor. The story it tells is slight and without the prop of Biblical legend; the complications negligible; the method of progression childlike; the characters without realistic definition. *Everyman,* to move his audience, must suggest in his tones,

his face, his every aspect, the emotions taking place within him. Of external aid he has very little. Those emotions are the real dramatic plot. Consciously or not, the author of this play was learning to lean on his actors for the deepening of his effects, learning how to contrive dialogue to which they could impart emotional quality, and situations in which the attention would focus naturally on the actor's expression. Particularly in the dialogue is "Everyman" superior to other extant moralities, because of the frequent dignity of its language, its rhythmic hints of the blank verse of a later age, and the simple, direct eloquence of its emotional moments.

After the usual introductory speech to the audience, here made by a "messenger," the play opens with a soliloquy by God (doubtless mounted high in a "Heaven" at one end of the mediæval stage), who laments the backsliding of His children, and summons *Death. Death* immediately appears, with the apt promptitude which characterizes all the moralities. If a character is needed—lo, there it is! *Death,* in the modern revival, was dressed in dark fleshings, on which was painted, in white, a skeleton, and the actor's face was made up, in gray and black, like a skull. The effect was startling, and probably some such effect was sought, also, in the mediæval production. God orders *Death* to find *Everyman,* and bid him bring his "reckoning," and the ominous figure turns from God, and immediately meets *Everyman,* walking on another part of the stage.

> "Everyman, stand still, whither art thou going
> Thus gaily? Hast thou thy maker forgot?"

His hollow tones bring up abruptly the debonair figure of *Everyman,* who listens with increasing alarm to the message this apparition brings him. Finally he asks who it is that demands a reckoning of him. "I am Death," says the figure.

And then comes one of those lines which the fifteenth century poet put into the mouth of his actor as a means by which he could express emotion effectively, and which was so apt for its purpose that it still can move us after more than 400 years.

"O Death, thou comest when I had thee least in mind——"

This line has the simplicity, directness and sincerity of true emotional dialogue, and needs only to be well spoken to inspire sympathy and interest for the speaker. It puts us inside of *Everyman* at once, and makes us forget the naïve externals of the story.

Death's reply to *Everyman's* attempt to bribe him is a restatement of the common mediæval conception of Death as the great leveller. *Everyman's* plea for more time he dismisses, and curtly informs him that once gone on this journey, he can nevermore return. Again there comes from *Everyman* one of those exclamations, simply phrased, which express inner suffering—this time a cry of loneliness:

> "Shall I have no company from this vale terrestrial
> Of mine acquaintance, that way me to lead?"

It is the cry of all men when faced with the awful realization that they must die alone. Spoken by the actor with proper feeling, it still further establishes for the audience a sympathetic understanding of his spiritual sufferings. *Death* soon departs, leaving *Everyman* tortured with fear, and wondering to whom he can turn for help and comfort. He turns first to *Fellowship* (who, of course, naïvely appears at exactly the right moment; the moralities troubled not in the least about surface probabilities, since they were frankly allegory). Here the situation is built up a little. First *Fellowship* promises never to desert his friend, and *Everyman* becomes happy and

hopeful, only to be dashed the lower when *Fellowship* deserts him on learning what the journey is to be. Again the dramatist gives to *Everyman* a forlorn cry—a single line:

"Whither away, Fellowship? Will you forsake me?"

which is charged with grief, and in the mouth of a good actor can be extremely poignant. It is good dramatic speech.

We see *Everyman* left alone a second time. He calls now on his kinsfolk to accompany him, but they, too, refuse (one with a touch of humor—"No, by our Lady: I have a cramp in my toe"); and a third time he stands alone. With every repetition of this situation, of course, it gains in poignancy. Now he turns to *Goods*—that is, "this world's goods." In the Ben Greet revival, *Goods* was exhibited by drawing back a little curtain over an alcove, and displaying a bloated figure, a sort of human moneybag, seated amid piles of treasure. Probably in the original productions an analogous effect was secured, and *Everyman* was placed, a lonely figure, in juxtaposition to visible worldly glitter. This, of course, is definite external aid to the actor. Learning that his goods can do him no good on this final journey, *Everyman* flings a tragic curse upon the bloated figure, who only laughs, as the little curtain is once more drawn across his alcove.

Now, at last, it occurs to *Everyman* to call on his *Good Deeds* for aid, and *Good Deeds* is revealed—a wan, female figure sunk on the ground and unable to rise.

"Here I lie cold in the ground;
Thy sins have me so sore bound
That I cannot stir."

This helpless attitude of *Good Deeds* is, of course, a visual symbol of much assistance to the play. When she shows *Everyman* the book of his deeds, and he cannot make out

one letter of it, realization begins to come to him of the folly of his worldly ways, and instead of his previous tortured search for his worldly friends to aid him, he turns with glad relief to the counsel of *Good Deeds*. She sends him to *Knowledge,* who at once leads him to *Confession.* Before *Confession, Everyman* sinks on his knees and pours out his petition. We are all aware that "confession is good for the soul," and confession scenes in fiction and drama have ever been readily understood and effective. This scene is no exception. Consider, too, *Confession's* calm reply, closing with the fine couplet,

> "When with the scourge of penance man doth him bind
> The oil of forgiveness then shall he find."

Spoken in a deep, quiet, soothing voice by the actor of the rôle, it marks clearly a stage in *Everyman's* pilgrimage from soul torture to resignation. *Everyman* rises from his knees with an exclamation of joyous thanks, and a look of exaltation on his face. He takes the scourge and strikes, and with the sharp crack of it *Good Deeds* suddenly rises with a cry—an electric and essentially theatrical moment, using "theatrical" in its strict and literal sense. Now *Knowledge* puts over *Everyman's* mediæval costume a long robe, the "garment of sorrow," and thus sombrely clad he summons, at *Knowledge's* bidding, *Strength* (i.e. bodily vigor), *Discretion* (i.e. volitional power), *Beauty* and *Five Wits,* in other words, the physical attributes of Man. These he expects will accompany him on his journey. Then he goes from the stage to receive the sacrament, and there is a brief interlude, interesting because *Five Wits* and *Knowledge* employ it to discuss the priesthood with some frankness. *Everyman* returns, shriven, but as they start on their journey, suddenly he grows faint, and before him yawns an open grave. At sight of it,

once more he is to learn sorrow of soul, for his beauty and strength and free will and even his five senses, desert him. To *Discretion* he cries out:

> "Yet, I pray thee, for love of the Trinity,
> Look in my grave once piteously. . . ."

and when all are gone, he laments,

> "Now, Jesu, help! All hath forsaken me!"

All, indeed, save *Good Deeds,* for even *Knowledge* cannot go with him into the grave. With a prayer to the Virgin, and the exclamation, "Here I cry, God mercy!" *Everyman* commends his soul to his Maker, and with only his *Good Deeds* beside him, though *Knowledge* stands close by, he sinks into his grave. An angel is heard singing aloft at the end, in welcome to his liberated spirit.

There is, of course, a definite unity to this brief play; it has a beginning, middle and end. Naïvely simple as the machinery of the plot is, the story is concerned, after all, with deep matters, the loneliness of the soul at death, the lesson Man has to learn that neither worldly goods, nor friends, nor wit nor strength nor beauty avail him aught when his hour comes. Only the knowledge of his good life can be for him a comfort at that awful brink. To express this without the aid of an elaborate dramatic fable, a persuasive picture of the life and death of an individual man, and make it seem more than an illustrated sermon, is not easy. The author of "Everyman" succeeded, however, as all of us can testify who have seen the play revived. He succeeded by concentrating the attention steadily on the figure of *Everyman,* placing that figure again and again in a position where its loneliness was emphasized, as one by one those things *Everyman* had relied on failed him, or else in a posi-

tion where the solemn and gentle figure of *Good Deeds* leads him forward as comforter and guide; and, also, the author succeeded by employing at the emotional crux of each situation simple, eloquent, sincerely felt language that could convincingly reveal the troubled soul of the hero. The concentration of attention on the leading figure of a play, in such manner as to bring out what is emotionally most significant, and the use of dialogue to express naturally and convincingly what is taking place within the speaker's mind or heart, are both artistic achievements. They do not just happen. They mark a growing command over their material on the part of English dramatists.

It is interesting to note that the famous German producer, Max Reinhardt, mounted a somewhat expanded and rewritten version of "Everyman," outdoors in Salzburg in 1926, treating it as a great dramatic pageant, and brought the same production to the Century Theatre, New York, in 1927-8. The play was far more moving under simple conditions.

7

INTERLUDES

The sixteenth century was a period of tremendous change and growth in the English theatre. When the century began the drama consisted of the naïvely simple mystery and morality plays, acted entirely by amateurs, the former always at stated intervals, and for the most part out of doors. There were no theatres, no professional companies, no professional playwrights, and little or no popular conception of drama simply as entertainment, serving an æsthetic, not a religious or didactic end. When the century closed, there were half a dozen professional theatres in London, there were numerous companies of professional actors, successful dramatists could hope to make a living by their pens, and William Shakespeare was at the height of his powers. In the sixteenth century the English drama advanced from "Everyman" to "Every Man in his Humour" and Shakespeare. Perhaps no other century in history ever saw so extraordinary a development of an art. Printing, too, was rapidly spreading during the same period, and naturally a greater wealth of drama is preserved to us (especially from the latter half of the century when scholars came into the theatre) than from the preceding age of manuscripts. The period, indeed, is so rich in material, and the dramatic experiments were so many and varied, the influences which shaped the drama so diverse, that any detailed account of the times becomes impossible in a volume such as this. We must consider certain broad tendencies which seem most significant in the growth of Eng-

lish drama, and a few of the specific plays which illustrate those tendencies.

Remembering that for two centuries at least the English drama had been strictly an amateur affair, that it had been presented by and for the people, in even the smaller towns, we can realize why the advent of the professional actor was delayed so long, and also why, when he did come, and a repertoire of plays without didactic purpose was shaped for him to act, those plays were less affected by the humanistic movement than the dramas of other countries, why they remained popular, and rebelled against the supposed classical rules, the formalism, of the Renaissance. Although, as the century advanced, interest in the drama penetrated all classes, and plays were written and performances given in colleges and at Court, in the halls of the nobles and in the meanest inn yards, the initial movement was from below rather than above. Coming first from the church universal, the English drama grew and spread as a popular thing, and owed little of its popularity, its fresh, vital life, to patronage by the rich and great. It existed primarily for popular entertainment. The English theatre was not to feel the pressure of aristocracy till another century, and from the scholars it accepted only so much as it could use for its own purposes, refusing to be stampeded out of its own natural path of development by the new learning.

Freed from the restrictions of Scriptural subject by the moralities, and encouraged by popular approval to enlarge the comic scope of the drama, the stage writers, as their next step, worked on a form of play called the interlude. Some doubt exists as to the origin of the word—whether from the Latin *ludus,* a play, or from the fact that these pieces were designed to be acted between more didactic dramas, or in

gaps during holiday festivities. Many of the moralities were termed interludes, and many of the interludes had a didactic slant. But, in the main, we may consider the interludes those pieces which grew immediately out of the earlier mediæval drama, and sought to make entertainment, generally of a comic nature, neither from Scripture nor didactic allegory, but from everyday life. In that sense, if you end it with the tossing of *Mak* in a blanket, you could call the Second Shepherds' play an early example of an interlude, except for one feature. The Second Shepherds' play calls for scenery of a sort; the stage is supposed to represent a definite place. When we come to the interludes, however, we find a frequent characteristic to be their evident lack of scenery. At any rate, they can be performed without any, the scene of the action being a neutral place. They can be acted on a bare platform. Furthermore, the number of characters is noticeably reduced from the crowds often demanded by the mysteries and even the considerable casts called for by some of the moralities. In other words, they are plays which a small group of players could perform pretty much anywhere, and at any time. And probably small groups of players did just that. The interludes were the first professional repertoire. We can readily imagine certain of the amateur actors of the mysteries and moralities enamored of their success, and preferring acting to candle-making or carpentry. We can imagine, too, the strolling minstrels and other entertainers of the Middle Ages desiring to take advantage of the popular interest in plays. And we can imagine the people, who delighted in plays, wanting a chance to see them oftener than once or twice a year, and the nobles and squires desiring this form of entertainment at will, in their houses. It was natural, indeed inevitable, that a class of professional actors should gradually make

its appearance, and that some form of dramatic entertainment should be evolved which they could present easily, anywhere it was wanted, and anywhere they could rally an audience. The professional actors and the interludes probably were evolved mutually, together making the next forward step in English drama.

Let us very briefly consider one of these interludes, choosing the famous "The Four P's," attributed to John Heywood, and printed before 1547. Here we have the attribution of a definite authorship, and a printed text; we are approaching the age of conscious literary art. Unfortunately, certain passages in this "newe and very mery enterlude" are coarse, with the honest coarseness of the Middle Ages, and it can hardly be publicly presented to-day. But its dramatic interest is so great, and its literary style so significant of the transition from folk drama to conscious art, that a study of it cannot be ignored.

First, it will be noted that there are but four characters, a Palmer, a Pardoner, a "Potycary" (the equivalent of a physician) and a "Pedler," and there is no definite scene. "Enter Palmer" is the only introductory stage direction. Four actors, with simple costumes, and what properties could be carried in a pardoner's wallet and a peddler's pack, could tour England with this play, mounted on four horses, or even trudging from place to place on foot. Neither is there any "action" in the play, in the sense of a story developed by movement and events. It is, rather, a kind of vaudeville, such as might be enacted to-day by four amusing comedians in front of the curtain while the scenery of a review was being changed. Just such interludes are still common. It depends for its interest on the liveliness of the talk and repartee, the wit and satire, the cleverness of the versification, and the trick ending.

Notice, first, how cleverly each entrance is managed. The *Palmer* has been boasting to the audience of his many journeys, and worked himself up to a fine pitch, when the *Pardoner* comes on, and remarks:

> And when you have gone as far as you can,
> For all your labor and ghostly * intent,
> You will come home as wise as you went.

Prick! The balloon is deflated, and the *Palmer* wheels on his adversary.

Then comes the *Pardoner's* turn to boast, and as he is concluding with:

> Give me but a penny or two pence
> And as soon as the soul departeth hence,
> In half an hour, or three-quarters at most,
> The soul is in Heaven with the Holy Ghost . . .

the *Potycary* has entered, and—prick!

> Send ye any souls to heaven by water?

The fun is off on a new tack. The fourth character, the *Pedler,* enters just as the other three have reached a point of belittling themselves, and his first speech is one of sarcastic regret that he has got into the wrong company. Each character, then, after the first, has been brought on neatly, to pick up the ball and give it a fresh toss, with something of the rhythm of a game.

The reader will now note how the *Pedler,* in his first long speech, anticipates *Autolycus,* and how, in several speeches that follow, the author is consciously playing with words, enamored of the sound of them, and getting fun, as centuries later W. S. Gilbert was to do, out of piling up long ones for

* Spiritual.

the actors to reel off—sixteenth century patter songs, you could almost call them. Soon the four players actually do sing a song, no doubt to give variety and interest to the play.

What plot the play has is an excuse to tell a couple of tall stories, and make a joke. The *Pedler* is made the judge, and the other three are to determine who will be leader, by seeing who can tell the biggest lie. This leads first to some coarse satire on the credulity of those who pay pence to Pardoners and Potycaries, and then to the three lies, for which the audience is all expectation. The second story, told by the *Pardoner,* is the one essential to the plot. He narrates how he went to hell and rescued therefrom a certain lady friend, whom the Devil was glad to be rid of, along with numerous other female inmates, because they were so cantankerous and made so much trouble.

Then comes the gag. It is the *Palmer's* turn to tell his whopper but he merely comments briefly on the marvellousness of the *Pardoner's* tale, because, in all his experience in many lands and places, he never saw a shrewish woman.

> I never saw nor knew, in my conscience,
> Any one woman out of patience.

The *Potycary* bursts forth with uncontrollable admiration:

> By the mass, there is a great lie!

And the *Pedler* judge, without more ado, awards the prize to the *Palmer,* probably to the enormous delight of the entire male portion of the audience.

Here, no doubt, the modern comedians would beat a hasty retreat behind the curtain—"exit on the laugh." But in the more leisurely Middle Ages they didn't snap off a climax that way. The play runs on for three or four more pages, and

contains at least one passage of curious prophecy, from line 1068 to line 1083. Turn to "Patience" and read Gilbert's recipe for making a heavy dragoon. The parallel, considering the centuries that intervene, is almost startling, and certainly the actor who reads the one or sings the other has to be a supreme master of his tongue, has to have an excellent sense for the humor of reiterated rhythm and the piling up of syllables. And both passages resolve themselves neatly at the end, round out with complete satisfaction the rhythmic phrase. The author of "The Four P's," whether his name was Heywood, or, as some conjecture, Thomas More, had reached a point where he not only had a feeling for language and versification, but for language and versification consciously adapted to the creation of a definite effect when spoken on a stage.

The wit and the literary skill of this interlude, the gay, scampering haste of its iambics, have long been admired. But what should most interest us here in the play is the fact that this wit and literary skill were cleverly adapted to a form of entertainment which could be acted easily, on any bare platform; that could, in short, be taken about by a small group of players and become possibly the means of their support, or at any rate of considerable gratuities. Further, the play takes its characters from familiar figures of the day, as Chaucer took his, lets them "slang" each other good naturedly, as men do, finds its humor in the simple expedient of swapping lies and making fun of the women (a very ancient form of humor indeed), and plays constantly on the interest of its audience by demanding of the actors a virtuosity of utterance, a triumphant enunciation of syllables falling helter-skelter. In an age when the English language was shaping into the glories of Shakespeare, there must have been a pecu-

liar thrill for any audience when they heard it so deftly and rhythmically used. There is in this interlude no sign whatever of an advance in dramatic plotting, nor could there very well be on a stage so bare and simple, and without precedent. The first task of the professional theatre was to break completely with the restrictions of didactic drama and find a form of entertainment which it could handle. The interludes were the first step in the solution—sketches in dialogue between mediæval characters, in which actors and authors alike learned how to make wit effective on the stage, how to write and speak in order to hold the attention of the crowd without the aid of scenery or religious story or solemn morality, how, in short, to be entertaining. If the drama has no appeal of religion or devotion, it must entertain to survive. Certainly, if it is to be professional, and charge admission fees or ask for tips, it must entertain. "The Four P's" was undoubtedly entertaining—and still is. That is its real distinction in the evolution of English drama.

8

THE FIRST ENGLISH COMEDY—"RALPH ROISTER DOISTER"

The next advance came as a direct result of the Renaissance. Hitherto the English drama had owed nothing to antiquity; it had grown spontaneously from the church ritual, and groped along the path of development as though Greece and Rome had never been. But with the newborn interest in classic literature, with the awakened curiosity among scholars in all manifestations of classic culture, the plays of Plautus and Terence assumed a place in the scholastic curriculum. Nicholas Udall, graduate of Oxford and translator of Erasmus, was master of Eton (1534-1541) and later of Westminster. He served for a time, also, as master of the Queen's revels (certainly in 1554), and quite evidently as a result of ability already shown as a playwright. It was Udall's play, "Roister Doister," which is generally acclaimed the first true English comedy, though he called it an interlude. And it is acclaimed the first "true" comedy because it is probably the earliest secular play we possess in which there is conscious, sustained and unified dramatic plotting, the careful tangling and untangling of a stage story. The play is, quite obviously, based upon the Latin comedies; its technique, even its theme, is taken over from classic literature. Just when it was written is not known, but in all probability it was prepared for use in Eton or Westminster school, to be acted by a group of schoolboys. It was an amateur contribution, and a scholastic contribution, to our drama, but an

immensely important one. It discovered to English playwrights the secret of manipulating a sustained story on the stage. We can well imagine that at its first production the audience was thrilled and delighted at its length, its complications, its sustained and mounting interest.

To us now, of course, it seems tame enough, if not indeed dull and feeble—probably less interesting than many of the simpler interludes which preceded it, because they have about them a fresh flavor of the English soil, and "Roister Doister" is, after all, second hand—how second hand one must read some of the Roman plays to discover, as "Miles Gloriosus." *Ralph Roister Doister* himself, of course, is that lying, ridiculous braggart who was a butt of Latin comedy, and who was later to be glorified by Shakespeare out of all recognition, into *Sir John Falstaff*. *Merygreeke* is the sycophant of Latin comedy. The pert servant wenches are similarly traditional. Critics have made much of *Dame Custance*, as a character drawn from life—an independent London widow of the sixteenth century. But most readers, I fear, will be hard put to feel her so. She seems rather a foil to *Roister Doister*, and when she leads her broom and mop brigade to battle, the whole thing becomes the most traditional sort of farce. But considered as a contribution to the nascent stagecraft of the English drama, the play is bound to be of great interest to every student.

In reading the play, you will note at once, of course, that it is divided into acts and scenes. The scene divisions are less important, because often they do not indicate changes of place or lapses of time, but merely the waves of progression made by the arrival of a fresh character, a shift in attention. In this sense, the word "scene" is still employed in the manuscripts of French plays, but the fashion soon dropped out of

the English theatre, which uses scene divisions only when there is a change of place or lapse of time. The act divisions in "Roister Doister," however, are extremely important, because they do indicate supposed lapses of time. Act II, for example, is obviously the day following Act I. In the second Shepherds' play, you will recall, the shepherds lay down to sleep, and the whole night was supposed to pass in a minute or two, while they were in full view of the audience. Such obvious inconsistencies could be tolerated only by a very simple-minded crowd, and the development of the dramatic story had to wait on the discovery of the scene and act technique. It is possible, of course, that "Roister Doister" was acted straight through, without intermissions, the vacant stage facing the audience for a moment as sign of scene change; but it could have been interrupted, and when schoolboys were playing it, perhaps was. If so, the audience knew for the first time in the English playhouse the sensation of rest, and then the resumption of the story *at a different point.* It is only by the dramatist's ability to bridge over the unacted gaps of his narrative in the imaginations of his audience that he can tell a story which is supposed to stretch over a longer time than the period required for acting it. The stage of "Roister Doister," it will be observed, is evidently a bare platform, and is supposed to represent the street in front of *Custance's* house. It is a "neutral place"— something we shall encounter again and again in later plays. Evidently it had on one side, or perhaps at the rear, a door, which could serve as the door to *Dame Custance's* house. Those characters not entering from her house came on to the platform, no doubt, from the opposite side, or from either side if the door was at the rear. This was the simple stage of the interludes. Heywood could do nothing on it but concoct a vaudeville

debate. But on it Udall told a considerably involved story. Now it was one day, now it was the next. *Roister Doister* came to his mistress's house and gave a letter to her maid, and went away. Then *Dame Custance* came out of the door and held converse with her servants, which informed the audience she had got the letter, till at last it is read aloud by *Merygreeke,* who by misplacing the pauses makes it utterly absurd and insulting. Later, of course, the scrivener is called in, who reads it correctly, and you wonder if, perhaps, the whole episode wasn't shrewdly adapted by Master Udall as a practical lesson in punctuation for his schoolboys. Always there were scenes in which poor *Roister Doister* was made sport of, that in Act III (Scene III) when *Merygreeke* bolsters his courage up to face *Dame Custance* suggesting not a little the scenes in which *Sir Lucius* prods *Bob Acres* in "The Rivals."

And always the story was taking place before *Dame Custance's* door, and more and more people were drawn into it, till when at last the spurned *Roister Doister* moved with his battalion to the attack, and *Custance* emerged, at the head of her household, to do battle, not less than a dozen characters were on the platform, wielding weapons, beating drums, and having, you may be sure, with schoolboys in the rôles, a superb time. This was, of course, the climax of the play, but the audience had been carefully put in doubt regarding the reception *Custance's* fiancé would give to the affair, when he learned of it, so he had to be brought on at the end, and a satisfactory or "happy" ending assured. The working up, scene by scene, to the burlesque battle, *Roister Doister* clad in his tinpot helmet, the women armed with household utensils and putting the braggart *Ralph* to ignominious and ridiculous flight, was what most interested author and audi-

ence, however. Complications were devised by getting one set of characters off stage and another set on, back and forth; suspense was created; and finally the expected clash was staged in full view of the audience, probably with uproarious effect. On a bare platform, then, an interesting and lively story could be told, by the simple device of breaking it up into scenes or acts, each one a separate situation, but each one preparing for the one to follow. In this way the imagination was prodded, interest intensified, and an anticipated conflict or climax watched for with increasing curiosity.

That was the contribution of "Roister Doister" to English drama. It brought the technique of the Latin comedy into our theatre, and expanded the interlude into a genuine play. The next step, obviously, was to adapt this technique to English characters, English life; or at any rate to write plays that should employ the newly discovered technique without imitating the Latin themes.

Such a play is "Gammer Gurton's Needle," written and acted at Cambridge University about 1554. Possibly, some think, it antedated "Roister Doister." There is no need to study this comedy in any detail, because it closely resembles "Roister Doister" in its adaptation of the Latin methods. But it is far more realistic than Udall's work. It is a broad farce of sixteenth century English peasant life which has the interest of a genre picture, and hence, to the reader to-day, is more interesting as literature than "Roister Doister." It does not appear to have been acted in London, however, as the other comedy undoubtedly was, so probably its contemporary influence was less.

9

JOHN LYLY'S COURT COMEDIES

London was now rapidly becoming the centre of artistic life in England, a process hastened not only by the increasing prosperity of the city populace, but by the patronage of the Court. The mystery plays had flourished in many of the cities of the kingdom, but the developing secular drama was drawing in more and more to the metropolis, much as we have seen it do in America in the early twentieth century. It was to London that the "wits" and other literary aspirants came when they were graduated from Oxford and Cambridge, and in the lively atmosphere thus created, with a hundred fresh winds from the Renaissance blowing in bewildering cross-currents through men's minds, the young English drama was subjected to all sorts of experiments, felt the pressure of many influences. To take the technique of Terence and apply it to contemporary themes was not so simple a matter as it sounds to-day. No one saw the problem clearly, if at all. No one, indeed, felt any necessity for treating native or contemporary themes. Most of the classical scholars, or humanists, felt a necessity for imitating the ancients, in fact. It was what we would now describe as the "highbrow" style to ape the antique. On the other hand, the rank and file, the crowd whose immediate ancestors had been brought up on the mysteries and interludes, undoubtedly wanted the picturesqueness or racy tang characteristic of those entertainments; it cared nothing for "correctness," and everything for theatrical excitement.

The first English tragedies were written in imitation of the Latin tragedies of Seneca, which probably were never acted in the theatre, even of Rome. They were dull, frigid, long-winded affairs, rigidly excluding all humorous contrast ("comic relief") and relegating all the real action to the wings. What would have happened if English tragedy could have begun with Euripides, instead of Seneca, we can only surmise. Perhaps Marlowe would have been greater than Shakespeare. But it didn't. The first English tragedy was "Gorboduc," by Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, acted in 1562. "Roister Doister," the first comedy, aped Latin plays which were popular in the Roman theatre. "Gorboduc" aped Latin plays which were, in their turn, but misunderstanding copies of the Greeks. Nobody to-day can possibly wade through "Gorboduc" with any pleasure, but the student should examine it briefly, noting how each act is preceded by an allegorical dumb show that takes the place of the classic chorus, and must have been easily the most picturesque part of the performance—and, incidentally, well understood by English audiences accustomed to allegorical drama for two centuries and more. The student should also note how, in this tragedy, blank verse is employed, instead of rhymed and more rapid metres, and how the platform stage becomes at will the court of *Gorboduc,* or of *Ferrex* or *Porrex.* In other words, by the technique of separate scenes or acts, the audiences were now being taught to accept whatever *locus* the dramatist needed, without the employment of scenery. The strict, frigid Senecan tragedy, however, was quite evidently not to the taste of the English theatregoers. Whereas in France its formalism was accepted and developed into the tragedy of Racine and Corneille, in England it rapidly broke down under the play of many influences, among them of

course the Elizabethan Englishman's love of fun and distaste for formality, and developed instead into the free, exuberant, lawless glory of Shakespeare.

Among the many influences which played upon the expanding drama in England was the widespread interest in romances, translated from the Italian and other tongues, discovered in ancient mythology, and found in the history of England itself. To a nation becoming rapidly self-conscious and racially alert, its own history is, of course, romantic. In the early days of our own republic, it is noticeable that many plays, crude to be sure, were written about the Revolution and the War of 1812. So, in England, in the latter sixteenth century, the chronicle-history play sprang into popularity. Another influence affecting the drama was the increasing attention to form, to language, or what we would describe as style. This, of course, was due to the increasing education of the writers and their Court, if not their popular audiences, and to the influence of the Renaissance. Drama became consciously "literary." Still another influence, too subtle perhaps to analyse, certainly in any space here available, but nonetheless real, was the Renaissance spirit of individual initiative, the belief in the worth and greatness of the individual soul. That spirit had many manifestations. Protestantism and the Puritans, paradoxically, were one manifestation, and that spirit settled America. Another was seen in the speedy rejection by English dramatists of the neo-classic dogma that tragedy must always conform to the unities of time, place and action (or mood), and their acceptance of romantic freedom. To see how these influences, and many others, affected the English drama, and how technical developments were made to cope with the new problems presented, would be too long a study to undertake in any detail here. At best we can

consider two or three plays which stand out as representative of some definite advance.

Perhaps the most interesting play to read as an example of one phase of the romantic influence on the drama of this period, and of the growing attention to style, as well, and of the discovery of prose for dialogue, is the "Alexander and Campaspe" of John Lyly, produced in 1584, by the child actors at Court, not in the public theatres which had arisen in London in answer to popular demand. Lyly was one of those dramatists who came up to London from the universities. He wrote, in 1578, a book called "Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit," which had great vogue in its day, and influenced many young writers. From it was coined the word euphuistic, because of its style, a style full of antithesis, alliteration, classic references and over-ingenious puns, and in general an air of affected elegance. This, of course, was a characteristic reflection of the Renaissance spirit; but such a style, even then, could not last long in the popular playhouse. Lyly wrote the plays which followed his book for the Court, not the populace. To dramatic construction, he contributed little or nothing. The reader of "Alexander and Campaspe" will probably be struck at once with the fact that *Trinoclea* is apparently the leading character in Act I, but thereafter disappears entirely from the play. Then, too, there is frequently no connection between one scene and the next; an entire episode leads nowhere. Indeed, the entire *Diogenes* sub-plot ends in the air; it has no structural relation to the rest of the play, nor any development. We are in doubt till almost the close of the drama what the relationship is between *Alexander* and *Campaspe,* and above all, perhaps, we do not feel, in the scenes where it should be present, any real throb of emotion. What we do find is a comedy in which romantic love is the

subject, something we have not hitherto encountered in English drama (and something we shall never cease to encounter thereafter!), and in which the dialogue is written in prose, even though it be a prose so mannered and quaint to our ears as to seem hardly more realistic than verse. Furthermore, this prose is at times, especially in the *Diogenes* scenes, "pointed up" with wit and precision till it gives a hint of the weapon for comedy and satire English prose was to become in the theatre of Congreve, Sheridan and Shaw. With that in mind, read aloud the latter part of Scene I, Act II, in which *Diogenes* talks back at the King, or Scene II of Act III, in which *Apelles* and *Campaspe* spar, or again Scene III of Act V, where *Diogenes* and *Alexander* once more cross wits. Although many of *Diogenes'* retorts were not invented by Lyly, he was responsible for the phrasing and the setting, for the short, sharp, epigrammatic give and take of the dialogue. It had a polish and edge that foreshadowed the future prose drama and that probably suggested to Shakespeare and other writers immediately following the employment of prose for their comedy scenes. It should also be noted that the lyrics in this, and other of Lyly's plays, are dainty and polished, again foreshadowing the lyric loveliness of Shakespeare's songs.

Probably no reading of the play can do justice to its effect on the audience that first saw it acted in Blackfriars Inn Court, by the carefully trained choir boys. It is a common mistake to judge old plays by their present effectiveness, and still more by their interest as printed literature. The element of romantic love between *Campaspe* and *Apelles, Alexander's* renunciation to make the consummation of the love possible, the odd charm of hearing prose on the stage, and above all the comical spectacle of this old *Diogenes* crawling out of his tub there on the stage, like a dog out of a kennel, and daring

to tell Alexander the Great where to get off, all were elements of appeal difficult to recapture now. Especially we must not forget that the tub of *Diogenes* was visible on the stage (whether it was removed after the *Diogenes* scenes, or whether it remained permanently at one side of the platform, is not certain from the text). This addition to the bare platform stage of a "property," and a comical one, enriched the scene, and added greatly to the fun. It prepares us for the further enriching of the Elizabethan stage.

But nothing in the play itself is more engaging than Lyly's prologue, written for the first production at Blackfriars. "But, as Theseus, being promised to be brought to an eagle's nest, and, travailing all the day, found but a wren in a hedge, yet said, 'This is a bird,' so, we hope, if the shower of our swelling mountain seem to bring forth some elephant, performe but a mouse, you will gently say, 'This is a beast.'" The man who could write that was a civilized gentleman, and let us gently say that "Alexander and Campaspe" is, if not an elephant, at least a beast which brought the message of grace and elegance and the romance of woman's love to the crude drama of England.

10

THE FIRST PERMANENT THEATRES

Kyd and "The Spanish Tragedy"

About the year 1586 a play was produced in the professional theatre of London which must have had a great influence on the development of English drama, because it was immediately successful with the public, and remained so for a full generation. Nothing, in the professional theatre, is imitated like success. Thomas Kyd's "The Spanish Tragedy," which was a Senecan tragedy of revenge adapted to the bold, romantic tastes of British theatregoers, with murders taking place on the stage instead of off, with a considerable degree of excitement worked up by what must then have seemed extremely clever stagecraft, was what we could call a "thriller" and took the stage by storm. To it, in all probability, we owe Shakespeare's "Hamlet," and certainly to it we owe much of the technique whereby the great Elizabethans manipulated their scenes to create illusion and rouse suspense on their platform stage. Kyd was one of the "University wits" who came into the theatre from the colleges, but he was a born dramatist, a manipulator of theatrical story, and after the success of his play, it was incumbent on other playwrights to create suspense and excitement, also, if they could. The public would see to that!

For, by now, the public had strictly to be reckoned with, since their pennies, paid at the door, supported actors and dramatists and managers. The drama had grown up in England as an amateur affair until the sixteenth century, and it

went through three-quarters of that century before any theatre was built, even though bands of professional players had sprung up and were acting interludes, singing songs, later playing "Roister Doister" and the developing drama, in the yards of inns, in the halls of the nobles, and anywhere else that an audience would and could assemble. It is interesting to speculate just why the amateurs yielded place to these strolling professionals. One reason, no doubt, was that the public wanted to see plays oftener than the amateurs could find time to supply them. But another probably was that with the growth of secular comedy fewer and fewer amateurs could give satisfactory performances. We know to-day that nearly anybody can, with some coaching, take part satisfactorily in a Christmas play in a church, but only the most talented can give an endurable performance of Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest." The same principle was at work in the sixteenth century. The more highly developed drama becomes, especially the comic drama, the more skillful and practised and naturally apt its interpreters have to be.

But the sixteenth century bands of players could not have been highly remunerated by their haphazard performances in halls and inn yards. Moreover, these performances often attracted rowdy and riotous audiences, for the Britons of "good Queen Bess's glorious days" were more energetic than refined. They made trouble for the city authorities, and were, moreover, severely frowned upon by the stern Puritans, who were already getting a grip on civil affairs. The player bands had to put themselves under the nominal protection of different Court officials or nobles. It was undoubtedly to stabilize a precarious profession, and to make it pay a steadier return, that John Burbage (father of Richard Burbage, the great actor of Shakespeare's day), who had learned the trade

of joiner before he became a theatrical manager, erected the first theatre in England since the days of the Roman invasion. It was erected and opened in 1576, at Shoreditch, outside the city of London walls, to escape the civil authorities, and it was called simply "The Theatre." Within a year a second house was opened close by, called "The Curtain." Accordingly, the professional drama had been housed in theatres for about ten years when Kyd's play was produced, and for only twenty-five years when Shakespeare wrote his greatest plays.

Exactly what the Elizabethan theatre was like we do not know, though ponderous books have been written to demonstrate this or that theory. Not one of the theatres is now standing, and the few pictures which have come down to us are conflicting, and some of them quite evidently inaccurate. But enough is reasonably certain to give us a working understanding of the stage for which Kyd and Marlowe and Shakespeare wrote, and to explain the technique of their plays, so far as that was dependent on the physical stage. The first theatres were almost certainly modelled on the inn yards where the plays had previously been performed, with perhaps a hint from the extant Roman amphitheatres. The building was possibly circular, or more likely hexagonal in shape, and had no roof except over the tiers of galleries which ran around the inside of the walls, corresponding to the galleries which encircled the enclosed inn yards. In these galleries were seats for those who paid an extra penny or more. The floor (probably bare ground) had no seats, and was called the pit. Here the crowd stood. Jutting into this pit was the stage, a bare platform elevated three or four feet, which could be removed in the earlier theatres and the pit converted into an arena for bear baiting and similar arena-like spec-

tacles. This stage was probably shaped like a wedge of pie, with the point cut off. The audience stood in front, and on both sides, so the actors were almost on an island amid the crowd, and of course extremely close to the foremost spectators. There was no separating orchestra pit and proscenium arch, as we have in the theatre to-day; the actors stood out free of all scenery, under the broad daylight streaming down through the roofless structure, and you may be sure had to know how to handle a crowd. At the back of the stage, however, there was a considerable opportunity for the creation of illusion by mechanical aids, and it is extremely likely that the entire stage, therefore, appeared much less bare to the Elizabethans than it would to us to-day.

In the first place, the first gallery, or balcony, which ran around the pit, also kept on around the rear of the stage, at which point it furnished an upper level which the actors could use. It could be provided with windows, as the upper story of a house; or it could be the battlements of a besieged city in a chronicle-history play. It was the balcony of *Juliet*. We shall soon see how it was employed in "The Spanish Tragedy." Over this balcony a pent-house roof projected, probably to keep rain off the stage and the precious costumes and properties. Under the balcony, probably far at the sides, were two doors, admitting to the stage from the dressing rooms, and from the stage to the stairs by which the actors reached the upper level. Between these doors, and under the balcony, was an alcove. This alcove was screened with a curtain, and behind the curtain properties could be placed, unseen by the audience. When the curtain was drawn apart, the alcove could thus serve as a room, a cave, etc., or it could, by virtue of the properties placed in it, give the key to the whole stage, suggest the scene. The width of this alcove, and its use, are

a matter of endless debate among scholars. But its existence is certain, and the employment therein of properties, even approximating scenery. If in front of such an alcove you have only a bare platform, the eye will inevitably go across the platform to the color and interest of the scenic setting at the rear, and your entire stage will tend to gain whatever illusion the alcove gives. So surely will this happen, even to-day, when we are accustomed to stages filled with scenery, that the older acceptance of the Elizabethan stage as a completely bare platform is hard to understand. It had the means, not—to be sure—of mechanical reproduction of a scene, but of mechanical *suggestion* of a scene, and this means it frequently employed. It was not the actually bare platform of the interludes. Rather was it the platform of the interludes set in front, as it were, of an adaptable mystery pageant wagon. And it gave to the dramatists who wrote after 1576 a much more flexible stage than Udall possessed for "Roister Doister." It was another contribution to the advancing drama. Nor should we forget that an alert audience, trained to follow plays on bare platforms, in the courtyards of inns, at the end of halls, must have been quickly responsive to a hint. A bit of property, a bed or chair or tree, did the necessary work. To-day, if a person unaccustomed to motion pictures is taken to see one, he is often bewildered to follow the scene sequence, because he is not accustomed to the technique. A boy of twelve beside him will very likely follow the picture without the least trouble. So we might be bewildered by the Elizabethan scene shifts, when to the Elizabethan audiences each scene, visually, or in a line of dialogue, instantly made itself clear.

Let us now consider "The Spanish Tragedy," particularly in its relation to this Elizabethan stage.

The play opens with an "induction," taking the place of the Senecan classic chorus, and the *Ghost of Andrea* and *Revenge* appear, the former in a long speech explaining what has happened prior to the play, in order that the audience may understand what is to follow. *Revenge* then promises the *Ghost* that he will show him how his death is avenged, and the two sit down at one side, or perhaps in the balcony above, as supposedly invisible spectators of the play. To our modern standards of exposition, this beginning is crude and clumsy, as indeed it evidently seemed to William Shakespeare less than two decades later. Read at once, for comparison, the opening scene of "Hamlet." In Shakespeare's tragedy the scene opens with two sentinels on the battlements. In a few brief, marvellous sentences expectation is excited regarding the *Ghost* of the *King,* after *Horatio* and *Marcellus* have entered. *Bernardo* starts to tell of the apparition, and almost at once—

"Peace, break thee off! look where it comes again!"

The *Ghost* enters as an integral part of the play, preceded by a shiver of awe and expectation, and the exposition, or explanation, of this *Ghost,* and of past events, is all accomplished as the play moves excitingly forward. It would be hard to find a better example of the technical progress of the drama than in these two illustrations. Yet Shakespeare's *Ghost* and the revenge theme of his play, must undoubtedly have stemmed pretty directly from Kyd's example, which he in turn took from Seneca.

The second scene (the first scene of the play proper) is, of course, one of those long-winded and undramatic explanatory scenes, copied from the stilted Latin tragedy. The next scene is the same, but in the Court of Portugal, as the previ-

ous scene was in Spain. The Viceroy says at once—"Is our Ambassador despatched for Spain?" and the audience took the hint. At the end of this scene the reader will note something still only too characteristic of playwrights who are not first-rate. The *Viceroy* orders *Alexandro* to be killed upon the mere unsupported charge of *Villuppo,* without giving him a chance to say a word in his defense. The reason was, that if he had acted as any real person would, and heard *Alexandro's* side, one complication of the play would have been cleared up then and there! Many a third act since has been made possible because the playwright arbitrarily refused to let somebody in Act II say the words which would have cleared up everything.

Scene IV is still Senecan, permitting *Horatio* to describe events that had already taken place; but a touch of developing drama is introduced when *Bel-Imperia* shows her rising interest in her dead lover's friend, and at the very end words are spoken which are a direct hint to the audience what to watch for in the next scene. Scene V is headed "Enter the banquet, trumpets, the *King* and *Ambassador.*" The word "enter" in Elizabethan stage directions sometimes meant enter; and sometimes, quite evidently, it was a stage term signifying merely that such and such was disclosed. A banquet cannot well "enter," unless we take the term to mean the banquet guests. What we may assume here is that behind the curtain of the alcove a table had been set, the curtain was drawn away, and the stage gave the suggestion immediately of a banquet hall. *Horatio* and the rest, who were on at the end of Scene IV, probably moved back a little toward the alcove, as if walking into the room.

This is the last scene of the act, and *Hieronimo's* picturesque masque, or dumb show, with its frank sop to British

chauvinistic pride, makes a colorful climax. It is like the breaking out of the American flag as the climax of a musical comedy finale, in one of G. M. Cohan's early plays.

As the scene concludes, and the actors withdraw, the audience are once more aware of the *Ghost of Andrea,* and *Revenge.* The former, quite naturally bewildered, says he doesn't see how his death is being avenged by giving a banquet to the man who killed him, and neither, of course, did the audience. But *Revenge* promises him that he *will* see, before the play is over; and at those words, the audience, no doubt, were more than ever curious to learn what was to happen next.

Scene I of Act II seems to need no localizing. The stage could be any neutral place. The scene is devoted to hatching the plot of *Lorenzo;* but this, be it noted, is handled with considerable liveliness. *Lorenzo* draws his sword on *Pedringano,* and frightens a confession out of him. That confession causes *Balthazar* to "start back," and for a moment there is even a hint of some character drawing in *Balthazar's* perplexity at plotting against a man he likes. At the end of the scene *Lorenzo* and the *Prince* go off stage, through one of the doors at the back, of course, and the stage is given over to (Scene II) *Horatio* and *Bel-Imperia,* making love. It is supposed, perhaps, to be a different place, or perhaps that didn't matter, for almost at once the treacherous servant is seen leading the plotters on to the balcony above, and the audience realized that they were spying upon the lovers, and pricked up their ears. There seems no actual need for this scene in the play, since *Pedringano* could have led the plotters to the later assignation just as well, if they had not overheard the lovers make their plans. Evidently it was introduced by Kyd less to advance his plot than to add spice, and

to permit the ironic juxtaposition of lovers' vows and vengeful comments from the eavesdroppers above.

The next scene is nothing but a cog in the plot, one of those brief interludes so easy to put upon the Elizabethan stage, on the bare front platform, to explain the advancing story, and of no other interest. Even Shakespeare was the guilty author of scores of them. We might liken them to the subtitles employed by second rate motion picture directors in "silent" films, who lack the skill to tell what they need to tell by the camera alone.

Scene IV, however, is of another kidney. It is, even to-day, a thrilling scene, and in its own era must have been something of a revelation. *Horatio, Bel-Imperia* and the treacherous servant (who, the audience knows, is about to betray them) enter. *Horatio* speaks—"Now that the night begins with sable wings——" one of those speeches obviously written to give the audience a hint of the time and place—"Come, Bel-Imperia, let us to the bower." They go to the bower, which of course is the rear stage, or alcove, which during preceding scenes has been dressed with greens and a property tree large and strong enough to suspend a man on. The servant slinks out to bring in the plotters, and the two lovers, unaware of impending doom, fall to rather pretty amorous sparring, while the audience, tense and excited, wait the coming of *Lorenzo* and the *Prince*. Suddenly they come. *Horatio* is strung up on the tree and stabbed to death. *Bel-Imperia* lets out a piercing shriek. Her mouth is gagged, and the murderers carry her out. Then, doubtless by the opposite door, *Hieronimo, Horatio's* father, rushes on, "in his shirt" —roused from bed by the cry of murder. He sees his son's body, cuts it down, and lamentably bewails. Then his wife comes on, and at once joins her lament to his. Here disregard

the additions to the scene written in by a later hand (pernaps Ben Jonson's) and printed in italics in modern versions of the play, and note that the original act ends as the two elderly and stricken people, tragically bowed with their sudden grief, carry their son's body from the stage. Here is a second act ended with a strong and vivid climax—and, incidentally, the revenge the *Ghost* desires to see apparently farther off than ever! The audience has been excited; its crude taste for blood has been tickled by the sight of murder on the stage, before its very eyes (which, of course, was not "classic" at all), and finally, the spectators are more in doubt than ever how the story is going to turn out, how the poor *Ghost* is going to be avenged. Apparently vengeance is farther off than it was before; villainy is prospering.

Act III, Scene I, picks up the story of poor *Alexandro,* by now almost forgotten, and gets him out of his difficulties. Here we have one of those sub-plots, later to play so large a part in drama, and now in our day either abandoned altogether or woven so closely into the texture of the drama that we do not feel them as sub-plots. Kyd and his fellows employed them because the audiences then were gluttons for stories, and the more threads a narrative carried, the better they liked it. Also, this scene shows us on the stage one of those situations still dear to audiences and authors—the last minute rescue. *Alexandro* is saved from death just as—well, just as the parson is in the very modern Mr. G. B. Shaw's "Devil's Disciple"!

Scene II opens with poor old *Hieronimo's* lament for his son, which has been so often laughed at because of its "artificial" phrasing, but which probably didn't seem particularly artificial to audiences who had listened to the language of the Euphuists, and which wouldn't have displeased them

because of its artificiality, anyhow. They enjoyed artifice in language. Our modern cult of realism has made us forget that there were once other standards of taste.

The balcony is now again employed. It probably showed a window, supposed to be that of the room where *Bel-Imperia* was confined, and out of this window fluttered down the letter to *Hieronimo's* feet, written in blood ("red ink," as the stage directions inform us). The scene reveals to the plotters that the old man suspects them, causes *Lorenzo* to plot further murder, and shows him to the audience becoming involved in the growing web of crime, even as was *Macbeth.* The next scenes move rapidly on a stage that could easily have been without properties or any setting in the alcove. The place was sufficiently indicated by the dialogue. They are concerned with lively events—the murder of *Serberine* by *Pedringano,* his capture by the *Watch, Lorenzo's* grim jest plotted against him; and the scene in which this jest is carried out. Of course, the Elizabethan audience was delighted to see the hanging of this treacherous servant, and it was an excellent joke to them that the box was empty which he supposed contained his pardon. It is the "comic relief" scene of the play, though probably we should not find a scene to-day, in which a man was hung, hilariously funny, even if he were a scalawag.

Scene VII shows *Hieronimo* informed still more definitely regarding the murders, and rushing off to Court to "cry aloud for justice." Scene VIII (mercifully brief) exhibits *Isabella,* the wife, "running lunatic"—and, of course, suggesting to the reader *Ophelia* in "Hamlet." Scene IX displays *Bel-Imperia* "at a window"—of course in the balcony —and is introduced chiefly to indicate to the audience that she is still captive, and impatient that *Hieronimo* has not

avenged his son's murder. Scene X shows the vain attempt of the *Prince* to win *Bel-Imperia's* regard—his failure hardly striking us as odd, since he has just murdered her lover! We next see *Hieronimo,* half crazed with grief, trying to get the *King's* ear, and kept away by *Lorenzo,* and again in a long scene of soliloquy expressive of irresolution on his part, of a perhaps half mad scheme to feign "simplicity" and thus move toward his revenge. The prevision of "Hamlet" is, of course, obvious here. The continuation of the scene, where he attempts to fill his old part of judge, and is so moved by thoughts of his dead son that he tears up the bond of one of the petitioning citizens, is genuinely moving, and approaches drama in the deeper, Shakespearian sense. The final scene of this act, rather palpably devised to intensify suspense and prolong the solution of the story, shows the Duke effecting a "reconciliation" between *Lorenzo* and *Hieronimo,* the latter new-practising his "simplicity" and pretending to the utmost sincerity. Such a scene, of course, gave the actor a chance for expressive byplay, it pleased the audience to feel that they were partners to *Hieronimo's* deception, and yet it made them still more curious to guess how the play was coming out. But one would suppose they must have thought *Andrea's* ghost a trifle stupid, when he couldn't see through *Hieronimo's* bluff.

The last act will constantly suggest "Hamlet." The first scene is given up to *Hieronimo's* scheming to effect his revenge by staging a play before the *King,* with the murderers as actors in it. The second scene again employs the back stage alcove, set again as the arbor (or perhaps still set, for the alcove may very well not have been employed since the first arbor scene). *Isabella,* the mother, enters, rhetorically raving, cuts down the tree on which her son hung, and

then kills herself. Evidently she stabbed herself within the arbor, so that the curtain could be drawn to hide her, for she is alone on the stage, with nobody to carry off her body and clear the platform for Scene III.

Scene III begins "Enter Hieronimo; he knocks up the curtain." He is setting the stage for his performance, and the curtain he "knocks up" was probably stretched from the back wall to one of the two pillars which on either side of the stage, and some way in front of the alcove, held up the roof over the stage, and were called the pillars of Heaven. The object of this curtain was to conceal from sight the dead body of *Horatio,* which he evidently brings on and of course has to keep concealed from the *King* and *Court* till the proper moment. The necessary properties are brought out upon the platform, and then the *King* and his *Court* enter to view the entertainment, but go up upon the balcony. The object of this was threefold—to leave the stage clear for the important action of the play within a play, to focus the attention of the audience on this play, and to enable *Hieronimo to lock a door* and be free from interruption while consummating his revenge. He begs from *Castile* "the key to the gallery," which is thrown down to him (*Castile* is a trusting soul!) after the royal party has ascended. This business with the key, which counts for so little in reading, must have counted heavily on the stage. There was something ominous about that falling key, and the sense that *Hieronimo* now had *Lorenzo* and *Balthazar* at his mercy. It also showed, on Kyd's part, a keen attention to the detail of plausibility. In every way (except the transparent device of begging the key from *Castile*) the episode is excellent theatre.

Now follows the play within a play, in which *Hieronimo* kills *Lorenzo, Bel-Imperia* kills *Balthazar* and then herself, while the audience know it for tragedy and the *King* and

Court on the balcony think it but a sham. Then *Hieronimo* shows the body of his son and, safe behind the locked door, tells what and why at great length, before crying, "I have no more to say," and running "to hang himself."

At that point the *King* and *Court* come to their senses, rush down and break in the door, and try to torture more words of explanation out of the old man. But he fools them by biting off his tongue. They bid him write, then, and he signals for a knife to mend his pen. Again a trusting soul gives him what he asks—whereupon he stabs the *Duke* and then himself.

"What age hath ever heard such monstrous deeds?" exclaims the *King.*

And the answer perhaps is that no age ever has, except the age of Queen Elizabeth. The *Ghost,* in an epilogue, now quite satisfied that he is avenged, gleefully summarizes the slaughter. The total of casualties was nine. There were one hanging, three suicides, and five murders, all taking place in full view on the stage. And the Elizabethan audiences ate it up! For that matter, the total in "Hamlet" is considerable —six, is it not, and a seventh before the play begins, to get things going? Shakespeare, after all, was writing for the same audiences as Kyd; he knew they liked their tragedies of blood—and he wanted that farm in Stratford. But "Hamlet" is a great and moving tragedy in spite of the slaughter, and Kyd's drama is an extremely important one, also. It is important not because it contributed the gift of revealing and poetic dialogue to the stage, for it didn't; nor because it contributed any powers of characterization. When Professor Nicoll in his "British Drama" says that *Hieronimo* is a vacillating hero because Kyd understood "subtlety of characterization," he seems to me to be talking nonsense. *Hieronimo's* vacillation may have suggested *Hamlet* to Shake-

speare, but *Hieronimo* is most certainly not an individualized character, any more than the rest of the puppets in this play, and his vacillations are only too obviously a mere device to complicate and prolong the story. If Kyd had possessed the slightest sense of characterization, he would neither have thrown *Bel-Imperia* so speedily into another lover's arms, nor permitted the ghost of her first lover to view the transfer with such calm indifference. No, the characters in Kyd's play have no real life, the story is as wild as any gory melodrama, it is crude, childish, improbable. But, as theatre, it had the supreme merit of getting visible, exciting action on to the stage, preparing the audience by the use of preliminary scenes to look eagerly for an expected event, and then satisfying that curiosity, of building up to a climax, of rousing to higher and higher pitch the emotions. With a bare platform stage jutting out into the crowded pit, an alcove behind, a balcony above, Kyd contrived in his last act to give the feeling that a half-crazed old man had his enemies at his mercy, though the King of Spain and all his Court looked on; he made the audience feel the tragedy as all the sharper because the *stage* audience thought it sport; and with stroke after stroke he swung his play along to its catastrophe, holding till almost the end that dagger blow which marked the revenge the ghostly spectator of the prologue had all along been waiting for. What Kyd and his kind contributed to the English drama was the technique of theatrical excitement, of spiralling curiosity and emotional tension.

And if the author of "Hamlet" and "Othello" and "Macbeth" had not learned that technique, and applied it with developed skill, all his poetry would not have saved those tragedies from stage oblivion.

11

MARLOWE, BLANK VERSE, AND THE SPIRIT OF THE RENAISSANCE—"DR. FAUSTUS"

We come now to a figure who has captured the romantic interest of the world ever since his violent and sordid death in 1593, at the age of twenty-nine—Christopher Marlowe. In talent, temperament, and tragic end, he was, in a sense, the Edgar Allan Poe of Elizabethan England. A poet of far greater poetic and tragic power than any of his predecessors or contemporaries (except, of course, the young Shakespeare), in his scepticism and curiosity a child of the Renaissance, but lacking Bacon's scientific balance and cool intellect, with a profound imagination of tragic hue, he came into the theatre from Cambridge University like a moody young Titan, not knowing quite how to use his own strength, straining in vain at the bonds of primitive theatrical form which held him down—and yet, as it proved, straining with such force that Shakespeare, his successor, could break them and free the captive drama into Life. Wine and women were Marlowe's undoing—though song was his salvation—as of more than one roistering Bohemian of his time. But even his contemporaries felt they were harboring a dissolute angel, and Shakespeare at least must have known, when he heard the blank verse of Kit Marlowe first spoken from the stage, that the dissolute angel had found the magic secret of dramatic dialogue which could unlock for an audience the deep emotions of the heart.

For Marlowe's contribution to English drama was not

structural form nor effective and plausible plotting. It was not even characterization, though his major characters, heroic figures who beat at the bars of life, were splendid individuals. Character drawing certainly advanced with Marlowe, because he made the dramatic struggle within the soul of a man, not against external forces. His great contribution, however, was the application of high poetic sincerity and insight to the dialogue of his plays, so that the speech of his people—of his major characters, that is—revealed their thoughts and emotions with subtlety, eloquence, and moving power. He could make their speech evoke a mood, reveal the torture in their souls (as "Everyman" hinted) or charm the listener with the *rightness,* the beautiful aptness, of the words. After "The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus" and "Edward II," no first-rate dramatist could ever again write as wooden and artificial and unevocative dialogue as that, for instance, of "The Spanish Tragedy," just as in our day after Ibsen no modern dramatist could represent daily life in the stilted and unevocative language of "London Assurance." He made poetry not an adornment and interlude of drama, but an integral element of it; he made dialogue alive and humming with overtones, a weapon for the dissection of the complicated human heart.

Marlowe's best play, structurally, is generally considered his chronicle history, "Edward II," in which he most successfully combined his poetic and revealing speech with significant and moving situation, and well studied character. But "Dr. Faustus" is probably of more interest to-day, for many reasons. It can, for instance, be revived and hold the attention of a modern audience. I have myself seen one professional and not less than three successful amateur productions. It was the first dramatic employment of the Faust legend, later to be made by Goethe into the classic dramatic poem of

the questing intellect. It illustrates the quaint mixture of superstition and defiant rationalism so characteristic of the Renaissance, when modern man was emerging from the Middle Ages (not that he is quite out yet); for Marlowe probably, and his audiences certainly, could take the old story of Faust's incantations seriously enough to find tragedy in the mere narration of the legend. And, finally, because it is deficient in well developed situation, because it is dramatically hardly more than a monologue, it illustrates most admirably Marlowe's contribution to the art of stage speech. Since *Dr. Faustus,* in soliloquy, can cast over us the spell of tragedy, can reveal his soul tortures, and can, also, evoke for us the ache of Helen's beauty, we can the more clearly gauge the dramatic value of the blank verse (and also the prose) which Marlowe forged, and bequeathed to his successors.

"Dr. Faustus" was produced probably in 1589 or 1590. It was evidently popular in its own day, and later, for it was printed two or three times early in the seventeenth century, and it was also acted in European countries, and was familiar to Goethe who greatly admired it. Yet structurally it seems at first glance a feeble composition—merely a string of none-too-carefully connected episodes, most of them taken from the old legend. It disregards the probabilities in the development of many scenes, the comic interludes are pretty poor stuff (some of them perhaps from a later hand), and hardly any one in the play except *Faustus* makes an impression on our imagination or sympathies. Yet the play, for Marlowe's audience, who loved a story—any story, the more romantically strange the better—must have had a novel fascination because of its theme; and for any audience, at any time, even to-day, the character of *Faustus* himself and the dominance of his soul struggle, so eloquently expressed, give the drama

a unity, a compelling atmosphere and mood, which compensate for many faults. This must have been particularly the case on the Elizabethan stage, because there the spoken word, poetry, rhetoric, counted heavily always, since the actor was for most of the time out on a platform three-fourths surrounded by his auditors, and it was by the spoken word that he must chiefly move them.

The play opens in *Faustus'* study, and in the Ben Greet revival on an approximate Elizabethan stage, this scene was set behind the back curtain, in the alcove. Greet did not employ the alcove again, except for the second study scene, till the scene in the *Emperor's* court, and then not again till in the final scene the drama rounded back to *Faustus'* room. But as we read the play, let us watch to see whether quite so much simplicity of staging is necessary, or even probably intended.

During the first scene *Valdes* and *Cornelius* are sent for, and come so quickly that it would appear they dwelt in the next room. They are employed here to further the story, and then disappear. In this case, nobody cares, because they are utterly colorless puppets. But a very few years later, when Shakespeare wrote "Romeo and Juliet," he used a character to further the story, and then killed him off—and came near, for us, killing his play off, too! Shakespeare has often been blamed for the error of dropping *Mercutio* midway through his drama, after everybody has fallen in love with him. But it was Shakespeare's unconscious genius which compelled him to make *Mercutio* a charmer. His brief stage practice had not taught him there was anything wrong in removing a charming character when his usefulness to the plot was over. He had to find that out by his own experience.

Scene II, in prose, a "comic relief," is evidently on the

bare platform, and supposed to be in front of *Faustus'* house, perhaps. Scene III may very well be a set scene, with a suggestion of trees in the alcove. The change could be made during Scene II, and in Scene I *Faustus* plainly mentions his plan to conjure "in some bushy grove." The green would make a good background for the hocus-pocus business with *Mephistopheles.* Note in this scene that while Marlowe follows the old legend in causing *Mephisto* to wear a friar's costume, he omits the bell that *Mephisto* carried as warning of his approach. Marlowe knew his theatre, knew that the costume would be ironic, but the bell merely comic, and hence would jar on the serious mood he wished to create when *Faustus* was on the stage. Note also, in this scene, *Mephistopheles'* reply to the *Doctor's,*

"How comes it then that thou art out of hell?"

He answers:—

"Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it:
Thinkst thou that I who saw the face of God
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells
In being deprived of everlasting bliss——"

The point of view is modern, not mediæval, and the expression is direct, eloquent, passionate, and except for being cast in heroic verse might be the expression of a modern. Clearly here is blank verse at once more subtle and more truly dramatic than any which had preceded it in the playhouse.

Scene IV is on the bare neutral platform, and is low comedy for the groundlings. But it gives a chance to set the alcove for Scene V, *Faustus'* study again. In this episode, where *Faustus* writes in blood the bond to sell his soul, the language of his speeches lifts the situation, even to-day, into dignity and tragic interest. Probably the reader will feel,

however, that this scene has no proper climax—it does not seem to end, but to fade off, to gutter out like a burnt candle. But if we imagine *Faustus* and *Mephistopheles* at the close simply walking forward from the alcove to the front of the platform, with no real break, and *Faustus* looking up, as if they had come into the outdoors, and saying the opening line of Scene VI—

"When I behold the heavens, then I repent——"

we can possibly sense how the two scenes might have merged on Marlowe's stage and the lack of climax in Scene V never have been felt. Probably some such method of staging was employed, largely no doubt to get *Faustus* upon the larger platform area, where all the new characters of Scene VI, including the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins, could be accommodated.

If the chorus mark the act divisions, or rests, in Marlowe's version, then Scene VII would be Act II, and a very short one, entirely comic, and of course a conscious slap by Marlowe at the Catholics. This scene was omitted entirely by Ben Greet, no doubt to avoid controversy. If he had dared play it, however, he would surely have had a banquet table set in the alcove, either during the preceding scene, or the chorus passage. Probably, even in Marlowe's day, there wasn't time enough for a change during the chorus, and that is another reason for playing Scene VI on the platform.

Scenes VIII and IX are on the platform—an inn yard most likely being suggested to the audience by the dialogue, and the scene division, made merely by the departure and re-entrance of *Robin* and *Ralph,* has no other purpose than to indicate the passage of time needed for the two to perfect their plans. Note how *Robin's* first speech, on his re-entrance,

tells the audience immediately that he has been doing what he left the stage to do a second before. This technique, of course, enabled the Elizabethan dramatists to speed their plays along, scene after scene, at a tremendous pace, with no sets to change, no curtain to drop, and a crowd in the pit perfectly willing to jump alertly ahead with them.

Scene X is the *Emperor's* palace. There has been time to remove the *Pope's* banquet table in the alcove, and substitute a royal throne, or other regal property; and no doubt this was done. The scene (as in Greet's modern revival) had a suggestion of pomp.

Scene XI will probably give the reader who tries to visualize it on the stage a bit of trouble. A note in the Mermaid edition of Marlowe's plays says "the scene is 'a fair and pleasant green' . . . and is presently supposed to change to a room in Faustus' house." This is misleading, for "transformation scenes" were certainly impossible on the public Elizabethan stage. But remember that Scene X was set in the alcove. *Faustus* and *Mephistopheles* enter in Scene XI, after the alcove curtain is closed, and *Faustus* suggests they are passing "a fair and pleasant green." Then follows the passage with the horse courser, during which the alcove setting is changed to *Faustus'* study again. Then exit horse courser, the curtains part and *Faustus* walks into his study, and sits alone in his chair. This study suggests meditation, and a passage of verse follows. Then he sleeps, and let us fancy that as his head nods forward, the curtains are closed, leaving *Mephistopheles* out on the platform, where the dripping horse courser, re-entering the stage, finds him. "I'll speak with him (*Faustus*) now, or I'll break his glass windows about his ears," cries the angry fellow, suggesting that he and *Mephistopheles* are supposed to be just outside *Faus-*

tus' house. "See where he is, fast asleep," says *Mephistopheles*—at which we can imagine the curtains parted again, perhaps by *Mephistopheles* himself, and the horse courser striding into the house.

Obviously, if Scene XI were so played, however, Scene XII could not be set immediately for the *Duke's* palace. But it is a very brief and unimportant scene, and is followed by another and even briefer one. Both seem to have been played on the bare front platform. But with Scene XIV we are nearing the close of the drama, and its climax of interest and beauty, as well. *Wagner,* in Scene XIII, indicates that *Faustus* and his scholars are approaching from a banquet. They are approaching the Doctor's study, no doubt. The curtain parts on the alcove to dress the stage, and we swing rapidly into the most famous passage of the play, where *Faustus* conjures Helen of Troy to life, and addresses her with immortal lines that have sung forever since in the memories of our race, and, when first spoken on the stage, must have subdued that Elizabethan audience with their loveliness and evoked, as no speech yet heard in the English theatre had ever done, the exact mood the dramatist desired. The speech rises, also, to a fine theatrical climax, and seems to bear *Faustus* and his love off the scene on the final surge of its music.

Scene XV is on the bare, neutral stage. It may be anywhere. It makes a break in the story after the Helen episode, to suggest the flight of time, but that is the most that can be said for it. To us now it seems a distinct intrusion, a brief jerk where we have learned to desire the steady pull of approaching climax. Then Scene XVI, the last, opens. No doubt it again is *Faustus'* study, making no change necessary from Scene XIV. Besides, the play should surely end in the

room where it began. No one can read this final death scene without a smile at the rapidity with which twelve o'clock follows eleven o'clock—and without a thrill at the impassioned beauty, the tragic power, of the verse. It was no trouble at all for the Elizabethan audience to accept three minutes of actual time as an hour of stage time. They got a thrill from hearing the clock chime eleven, then eleven-thirty—then midnight. With that first ominous boom of twelve, they shivered, even as *Faustus* shivered. The time had come! A clock booming is still an effective device in the theatre, but nowadays, with our insistence on the realistic probabilities, the best an author could do in an act would be to strike the three-quarters hour, and then midnight. But those minutiæ of probability didn't trouble Marlowe, nor his audience, and possibly they trouble us to-day altogether too much. A little less probability, if it resulted in a little more poetry, wouldn't hurt many a drama!

"Exeunt Devils, with Faustus"—and then Chorus speaks the epilogue—

> "Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
> And burned is Apollo's laurel bough——"

poetry again, in the lofty mood the audience must have felt at the moment, closing the drama with the deep voice of beauty. Closer knit with the play, spoken not by a Chorus, but by *Horatio* and by the new *King,* both characters in the play, an epilogue follows *Hamlet's* death, and it begins,

> "Good night, sweet Prince,
> And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest——"

And who shall say that Shakespeare did not learn that magic creation of a mood, that tragic benediction of beauty to

round out his play, from poor Christopher Marlowe, then a decade dead from a tavern brawl?

Looking at the play as a whole, we see that it falls into a rough alternation of grave and gay scenes (some of the latter perhaps added by later hands), and of scenes in which *Faustus* appears and those in which he does not. The longer and more important *Faustus* scenes are those for which the alcove was most probably set with scenery, and the alternation with comedy episodes conceivably gave opportunity for scene changes as well as the rhythm of variety. Moreover (as is quite apparent when the play is acted), Marlowe was striving here for a double effect; he was striving to tell a story interesting to the London mob, and likewise to depict something almost if not quite new on the British stage—the tragedy of a spirit at war with itself. He carried on his mediæval fairy story with episodes readily understandable and familiar to the groundlings; but his modern tragedy he depicted in selected and isolated scenes, without physical uproar and brutality (here are no murders and hangings) and by means of eloquent language chosen with the utmost skill. Omit the comic relief in which *Faustus* does not appear, and you have a kind of monologue play that bears more than a fanciful resemblance to a famous modern work—Eugene O'Neill's "The Emperor Jones." (Incidentally, in Marlowe's "Edward II" the incessant drumbeats curiously anticipate the tom-tom in O'Neill's drama.) Goethe said of "Dr. Faustus," "How greatly it is all planned!" Certain historians of the drama have called it a careless string of episodes, as in a sense it is. But can it be that Goethe was right in spite of that? I have a feeling that this play was far more cleverly ordered to please the London of 1590, and also to earn Kit Marlowe's title to immortality, than many of the critics have

realized. It told its story well enough for its day, perhaps, and it employed the limited resources of the Elizabethan stage and the great resources of Marlowe's poetic gift to throw the real emphasis not on mere story, but on the deeper places of drama, the human conscience, and it won through to a triumphant unity by the magic of its dramatic verse, the evocative power of its language. It marked progress by proving that great drama has a higher mission than story telling. To regard Marlowe's "stately line" as mere rhetoric, mere poetry (whatever that means) is nonsense. It was rhetoric, poetry, consciously and skilfully used to depict human character, and to create an emotional reaction in an audience. It was a contribution to English drama that made possible many of the great advances of the ensuing decades.

12

SHAKESPEARE

In the compass of this book, it is impossible to consider the plays of Shakespeare in detail. It may be presumed that all students are familiar with the major facts of his career, and with the more important of his dramas. Unfortunately, too few students have had the opportunity to observe these dramas on the stage, where alone, of course, they come to full life; and perhaps because of this lack they are all too seldom read and studied with the conditions of actual performance in mind. Shakespeare was not a great, isolated genius, writing poetic drama to be employed three centuries later as a bogey for bored students. He was an actor and shareholder in a theatre in London, during the last decade of the sixteenth and first decade of the seventeenth centuries, and he turned out plays in active competition with many other dramatists, in order to coax the pennies of the London crowd. Indeed, few dramatists to-day are ever so completely immersed in the practical playhouse as Shakespeare was. If G. B. Shaw, in our time, were an actor and part owner of a London playhouse, wrote his plays for that theatre, and himself took a part in them, we should have an analogy. George M. Cohan in America is such a one. It may fairly be assumed, then, that Shakespeare's plays reflected current tastes and fashions, employed the current technique, and reached their everlasting eminence not because they were primarily different from the other plays of his time, but because in some deep sense they were better than the rest and saw

farther into the future. Not all of them did, for that matter.

In Shakespeare's drama you will find reflected most of the influences that had been forming the theatre of his day. The chronicle-history play, in which the Elizabethans so delighted, he made known to us all with "Richard III," the Henry series, "Julius Cæsar," etc. The comedy of romantic love he developed into a love tragedy with "Romeo and Juliet," and into a fascinating blend of fancy and humor with "As You Like It," "Twelfth Night," "Midsummer Night's Dream," etc. The tragedy of blood and the tragedy of revenge left gory marks even on "Othello," "Macbeth," "Hamlet," but on those same plays, also, Marlowe left his mark, and in each one the enduring element is the depiction of a soul struggle, the triumphant and moving expression of profound human emotion, accomplished, in Shakespeare's case, by supreme dialogue reflecting character and imposed on superbly ordered and exciting and important situations.

Shakespeare made one contribution to the drama, of course, which was not only in advance of his age, but which his great genius placed in advance of our age. It was the contribution of character delineation. In his case, it resulted in part from sheer unconscious genius, in part from the realization that in the finest tragedy, and in the finest comedy, as distinguished from melodrama and farce, events must always be conditioned by character, must always result not by chance alone but because of some weakness or virtue in the individuals of the story. This realization probably grew on him slowly, as he worked and experimented. But his instinct for creating living men and women was visible from the start. We have already mentioned *Mercutio*. Another striking example is *Shylock*. In the childish, improbable, and altogether silly story of "The Merchant of Venice," *Shylock* was

quite evidently intended as a villain to further the plot, whom the Elizabethan audience would rejoice to see foiled, and then forget in the moonlit magic of the last act. But once he began to develop this character, Shakespeare's genius got clean out of hand, and *Shylock* became more and more a profoundly real person, till finally he assumed such proportions that, to-day, he walks away with the play. Consider, again, the vivid personality of *Gratiano,* who, by a few gay, ironic jabs of dialogue becomes quite unforgetable. Consider *Malvolio*—a vain fool to be made a farcical butt—only he will not stay so! Some pathos of inherent dignity keeps getting in the way, till we are uncertain whether to laugh or not. Consider—but why go on? The imagined people of Shakespeare's plays are as real to most of us as any characters in history—indeed, they are far more real. Their reality, of course, causes us to identify ourselves sympathetically with them when they are acted on the stage, and creates alike the illusion and the emotional warmth which make these dramas supreme.

The means whereby Shakespeare created this illusion of reality in his characters (so far as it was technique and not magic he employed), and the means whereby he made his characters the cause of climax and catastrophe, instead of the pawns in a story, should be the object of careful study, in a review of two or three of his plays already no doubt familiar to the student. For example, in rereading "Macbeth" or "Othello," watch each character for indications of any *inconsistency* forced upon it by the demands of the narrative; or for indications of Shakespeare's intention to inform his audience just what sort of person this character was, and then for scenes which follow *as a result of this revealed quality.* How, in each case of revealed character, is the revelation

made? Is it by skill in subtle dialogue, or by the easier method of soliloquy, or by some action which is eloquent of the thought or trait behind it? *Hamlet,* for example, reveals his character by soliloquy, by "thinking aloud"—and very marvellously, too; he reveals it in dialogue constantly, in his flashes of irony, of wit, of tortured tenderness. He reveals it in actions, as by his sudden leap into *Ophelia's* grave. With "Hamlet," with these subtleties of character delineation, overtones of revealing speech, consistent emphasis on the individual's inner life as conditioning and making significant outer events, we have come a long, long way from "The Spanish Tragedy." In a space of hardly two decades, within the active observation of thousands of London theatregoers, the English drama had moved from crude horrors and childish, if exciting, story to the deep regions of the heart and soul.

In studying "The Spanish Tragedy" we saw how the *Ghost* figured merely as a prologue, and spoke an opening chorus by way of clumsy exposition; and we mentioned how, in "Hamlet," the *Ghost* was woven into the fabric of the plot, and exposition was accomplished naturally, by a gradual unfolding of the tale. Take any one of Shakespeare's finer dramas, preferably a closely knit structure like "Othello," and run through it to note how far Shakespeare, working on the same platform stage as his immediate predecessors, omitted the transitional scenes, the quick succession of short episodes employed to advance the story, to make possible a change of scene, suggest a lapse of time, etc.; and, instead, developed his scenes at length, so that they have the uninterrupted richness of our modern acts. In "Othello," for example, there are almost no short transitional scenes, and such an episode as the downfall of *Cassia* is accomplished in a

long, sustained development. The great last act is in two scenes only. To a modern audience, the villainy of *Iago* is, of course, quite too obvious, and he is, besides, clumsily revealed in soliloquy—he does not "think aloud" like *Hamlet,* but tells the audience, rather, what he is, and what he is going to do. But otherwise the drama is developed with a sustained richness of incident, each incident flowing from that before—a technique which seems curiously modern and makes frequent change of scene unnecessary. Shakespeare did learn, then, a way to build a play considerably in advance of the commonly existing technique of the platform stage.

But in many of his dramas, even his later ones—and especially, perhaps, his latest ones—he was content to tell his story in the quick, episodic fashion, whenever that method was easiest, and to save his sustained energy for the "big scenes." Also, in such a play as "Twelfth Night," where a lovely, romantic story was interwoven with a farcical tale, he kept his two threads well separated most of the time, alternating the mood of romantic love with the mood of bibulous hilarity, much as Marlowe alternated his two moods in "Dr. Faustus."

In modern revivals of Shakespeare, on a stage designed for full scenery, it has long been impossible to play the full text, even of "Othello." Scenes have to be condensed, combined, omitted entirely. That always makes for confusion, because in the original play every scene had some purpose in explaining and advancing the story. The best modern solution of the difficulty has been to adopt the principle of a forestage, corresponding roughly, of course, to the Elizabethan platform, with the stage behind the curtain corresponding to the Elizabethan alcove. Then, by some juggling of scenes, or by the use of painted drops, alternate scenes

can be acted on this forestage, while the real stage behind is being set for the ensuing episode. After all, this is nothing, really, but the technique we found hinted in "Dr. Faustus," and which Shakespeare understood. It would be interesting to examine a Shakespearian play of many scenes, such as "Antony and Cleopatra," to discover the apparent position of those scenes in which the alcove seems most likely to have been opened and set with properties, and those scenes obviously acted entirely on the bare front platform. Note, first, whether there appears to be the probability of any definite alternation of dressed and bare scenes, and whether the dramatic dignity and richness of the scene appears to determine its use of a setting. If those scenes are aided with settings in the alcove which, dramatically, are most important, then it is obvious that Shakespeare and the Elizabethans attached importance to whatever scenery and mechanical aids to illusion were available, and accepted their simple stage as a necessity rather than an ideal. The rapid succession of battle scenes in this drama certainly admitted of no settings. It is hard to follow them in reading; to follow them on the stage, and keep the thread, must have required an alert audience, or one well accustomed to this technique. But it will be noticed that the scenes in *Cleopatra's* palace are so placed that there would always be time to arrange a set in the alcove; that the same would be possible for those more important scenes in Rome where *Cæsar* figures, and for the long, rich banquet scene on *Pompey's* galley, and finally for the monument. In addition, the balcony over the alcove was plainly employed both for an interior and an exterior. It is possible camp scenes were indicated by setting a tent on the stage, that might have folded out from behind one of the pillars supporting the stage canopy. However, the most fully developed

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single-scene episodes are supposed to take place indoors, and amid regal surroundings, or else with the use of such properties as chairs and a banquet table; and they are so spaced in the drama that they could be set, unseen to the audience, behind the curtain of the alcove, without interrupting or delaying the play. If, as Professor George P. Baker argues, in the theatres of Shakespeare's working days a curtain was also strung between the pillars of "Heaven," there was still more opportunity for stage sets, and even room to set and strike, unseen of the audience, tents for the military camps so often made the scene of episodes in all the historical dramas.

Shakespeare wrote "Antony and Cleopatra" late in his career. Why, after a drama like "Othello," did he revert to the technique of his youth? Was it because "Antony and Cleopatra," to us a tragic love story, was to the Elizabethans much more a chronicle history, and they desired to see the march of external events, crowded thick and fast upon the stage? Was it because Shakespeare himself hardly realized the advance represented by the single, sustained, richly developed scene, and was still quite as happy to jerk his play along with those brief episodes so easy to stage on the Elizabethan platform? Had he worked out "Othello" to its pitch of sustained and unified movement to show Ben Jonson and the other neo-classic critics that he could handle "form" as well as any one; and having demonstrated it, did he, in "King Lear" and "Antony and Cleopatra," lapse comfortably back to a technique more familiar to his hand and more easy? Or was it, finally, because the Elizabethan popular audiences didn't take any too kindly to a tragedy like "Othello," and were a little bewildered or oppressed by the concentration of attention and of mood it required—indeed, compelled? To-

day it is noticeable that young people who have been accustomed only to motion pictures often find the strain of attention demanded by a serious spoken drama distinctly unpleasant. Is there an analogy here with the Elizabethan audiences? The technique of "Antony and Cleopatra" is decidedly like that of the average silent "movie"—rapid flashes to propel the story, even "cut back" scenes. The Elizabethans were accustomed to this technique, and it amply satisfied them. Perhaps it really satisfied Shakespeare. Perhaps, if it didn't, he was willing to go back to it rather than court unpopularity. These questions, unfortunately, can never be answered. But whatever the answer might be, it would prove that Shakespeare was not an isolated genius, but a product of the theatre of his times, and obedient, consciously or unconsciously, to its customs and laws.

One thing more. Like Gilbert's tar, Shakespeare in spite of all temptations to belong to other nations remained an Englishman. He not only wrote for the popular theatre of his day, but he seems never to have had the slightest instinct or inclination to counter the popular preference for romance, action, freedom, in the drama. The classic "laws" formulated by the Continental Renaissance, which insisted on formal separation of tragedy and comedy, on unity of mood, on the absence of violent physical action from the stage, and which certain of his predecessors had tried to fasten on the English drama, meant nothing at all to Shakespeare. He never hesitated to inject comedy whenever he felt like it, he met every curiosity of his audience for a sight of actual events rather than a narration of them, by scenes full of lively and significant action and combat; he mingled prose and verse, he swept his characters through days, weeks, years of time, and jumped his scenes across the Mediterranean and

back again without a qualm. A century later Voltaire called him a barbarian because of this "lawless" romantic freedom. But it wasn't, of course, barbaric. It was the logical development of the English theatre, from the joyous mediæval popular folk festivals of mysteries and interludes, unencumbered by "rules," and making always toward greater naturalness, spontaneity, and truth to life. There was always a certain hard common sense about the English playgoer. He knew when he was having a good time, and he was not to be stampeded by the classicists. It is even a little surprising, I think, that with all the excellent prose employed by Shakespeare and others in comedy scenes, and sometimes elsewhere, the English playgoers did not sooner insist that prose be made the medium of all dramatic expression. However, they did not insist, for many long years, and neither did they get quite free of the idea that tragedy must be concerned with exalted personages. In spite of a few attempts such as "Arden of Feversham" and Heywood's "A Woman Killed with Kindness," the tragedy of the humble did not find its way into our theatre till much later. Kings and princes, lords and ladies, generals and supermen, were the heroes and heroines of the serious drama for Shakespeare and his fellows, and blank verse was their method of expression. A kind of exaltation enveloped them. To that extent Shakespeare was classic, but no further. His exalted characters were individuals, nonetheless, and he and his audience were interested in their fate as individuals. They became character studies, just as their story became a lively and exciting series of occurrences witnessed by the audience, not described by a "messenger." There was nothing cold, nothing external, nothing formal about this drama. It was personal, natural and warm.

And if later English authors had imitated the nature of

it, and the warmth, instead of the relative accidents of blank verse and exalted personages, the serious prose drama of modernity might possibly have arrived a good many years before it did.

13

BEN JONSON

Shakespeare wrote all his plays for the public and popular theatre. Before we can go on to a consideration of Ben Jonson, whose effect upon the future of English drama was, in some ways, greater than Shakespeare's, it is necessary to reconsider for a moment the London playhouse of the period. During the two decades from 1590 to 1610, several more public theatres were added to the two already existing. The new ones were first built on the south bank of the Thames (to avoid, of course, the city authority) and were chiefly reached by boat, making the Thames a gay scene in the hours before and after a performance. In style and arrangement these new houses evidently followed closely the first model. Certainly we know from existing builders' contracts that they copied each other. They were open to the sky over the rectangular or circular pit; there were three tiers of shallow balconies running all around three sides, provided with seats; there was a bare stage jutting out into the pit, and this stage was overhung rather high aloft with a roof or "heavens" to shed rain and also to serve, no doubt, as a place from which mechanical effects, even players, could be raised and lowered; and at the rear of the stage were doors, an alcove curtained off, and above it a balcony which could be used by the actors. Nobody knows how large these theatres were, estimates of their capacity varying from 300 to 3000. But as the stage of the Fortune Theatre was, we know, forty-three feet wide, and extended into "the middle of the yard," it would cer-

tainly have greatly overbalanced a theatre of only 300 capacity. On the other hand, from the specifications of the balcony timbers, and from the evident extreme shallowness of these balconies, and from the fact that the stage, forty-three feet wide, extended halfway into the pit, thus greatly cutting down the pit's capacity, it is extremely difficult to vision a theatre large enough, and strong enough, to hold 3000 people. Probably 1000 would be nearer the figure, which is roughly the average capacity of our modern intimate playhouses, which vary from 600 or 700 to about 1200 capacity. This point is important, and should be kept in mind, for we shall see later what a great effect the mere size of playhouses can have on the art of the stage. Also, it must be kept in mind that the audience was not separated from the stage by an orchestra pit, a proscenium, footlights. It surrounded the stage platform on three sides; some blades who could afford it sat on the edges of the stage itself, and "the quality," the lords and people of wealth who occupied the rows of boxes in the galleries, and had benches to sit on, looked directly down upon the actors. It was, then, an intimate theatre, to an extent difficult to realize to-day, and the give and take between players and public was quick and vital.

Naturally, it was the pit which exerted the most pressure on the stage, because the audience in the pit were closest to the players, and it was to the pit the actors evidently were prone to play. Witness *Hamlet's* advice to the players—warning them, among other things, not to split the ears of the groundlings. The groundlings, then, loved noise, they loved to see a passion torn to tatters, just as the next day, perhaps in this same theatre (the stage removed), they would see a bear or bull torn to tatters by dogs. These groundlings were the London mob, illiterate mostly, belligerent, out for a good

time, entirely masculine and glad of a scrap with men of the other party, coarse, noisy, and yet quite evidently sensitive to music, to poetry, to stories of romance and adventure. They were not a little like children, like small boys—obstreperous animals and yet ever ready to trail the fancy over the fields of ether. They were, on the whole, a healthy crowd, who, much more than the quality in the boxes above, conditioned the early Elizabethan drama, and enabled Shakespeare to lift them into regions of exalted poetry.

This popular theatre, of course, had to have its actors. Concerning their art we really know nothing, but from the fact that they handled acceptably the varied and sometimes difficult drama of their age, and learned to do it while playing in the very midst of a clamorous mob, we may assume that they knew their business thoroughly. Many of the leading players (like Shakespeare himself) were shareholders in the theatres where they acted, and hence greatly concerned in the success of the enterprise. The profession (in spite of the fact that legally the actors had to be under the "protection" of some nobleman or sponsor, and, in the eyes of the Puritans, acting was the high road to perdition) had a considerable stability, and when we consider the enormous place of the theatre in English life, it had a true dignity, also. No women, of course, had yet appeared on the English stage, and as women's parts can be played successfully only by boys, youngsters were constantly being trained for the stage. Probably, as Professor Baker points out, the presence of a tall, grave heroine and her pert, gay maid, in so many of Shakespeare's plays (as *Portia* and *Nerissa, Olivia* and *Maria*) was due to the fact that there were a tall, quiet boy and a short, mischievous boy in Shakespeare's company. Furthermore, boys had acted in England for many years.

Wasn't "Roister Doister" written for them? And in Shakespeare's London various boy choirs, as that of the Royal Chapel at Saint Paul's, gave regular performances and, according to the testimony, good ones. They must have been good enough to attract patronage from the adult companies, or Shakespeare would not have berated them so scornfully as he did in "Hamlet." The chances are that the majority of actors in the London theatres of this period started their careers very young, began with girls' and children's rôles, and by the time they reached their majority had already had a considerable schooling in that best of all schools for the theatre—the theatre itself. Finally, the dramatists were often at least, if not always, their own stage managers, and it is hardly conceivable that the man who could write "Othello" would be unable to train a company of actors into giving a pretty good performance of it. In their intimate theatre, close to, touch and go with, their audience, trained from childhood to the stage and schooled in the arts of verse and prose, tragedy and comedy, the Elizabethan actors were probably a resourceful, alert, efficient group of artists.

And it was into their hands that Ben Jonson put his comedies, which was at once a lucky thing for Ben, and probably an unlucky thing for the English drama.

Jonson was a poet, critic and classicist. Though not a university man, he was enamoured of the Latin dramatists, and of the whole Renaissance critical attitude. The imaginative romanticism of Shakespeare and writers like him roused Jonson's scorn. There was, to him, something a bit absurd in it. Sir Philip Sidney, not long before, had felt the same way. In "The Defence of Poesy" we read, "You shall have Asia of the one side, and Africa of the other, and so many other under-kingdoms, that the player when he cometh in must ever

begin with telling where he is, or else the tale will not be conceived. Now ye shall have three ladies walk to gather flowers, and then we must believe the stage to be a garden. By and by we hear news of a shipwreck in the same place, and then we are to blame if we accept it not for a rock. Upon the back of that comes out a hideous monster with fire and smoke, and then the miserable beholders are bound to take it for a cave. While in the meantime two armies fly in, represented with four swords and bucklers, and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field?"

On the early stage that Sidney knew the companies were evidently small, four swords and bucklers did for an army, and scenic effects were practically nil. How much more sensible—for a mind too rational to enter into this child's game of "let's pretend"—was a drama in which ideas took the place of action, or eloquence or satire filled up the time. Jonson, also, had something of this attitude (as G. B. Shaw has something of it to-day). He sought deliberately to rationalize the drama, by making it satirical and a comment on actual life.

Now, that is just what nearly all dramatic reformers profess to do. They profess to banish romanticism, or sensationalism, or "hokum" or falsity of one sort or another from the stage, and to substitute "realism," or truth to actual life. William Archer's entire book, "The Old Drama and the New," is given up to demonstrating that the drama of his day, *i.e.* from the 1880's to the 1920's, is a vast improvement on anything in the past because it is "closer to life." Ben Jonson was going to get the drama closer to life. He was going to banish this romantic nonsense from the boards. Almost his first blast was a comedy called "Every Man in His Humour," produced in 1598, and it is that play we shall

now have to read. I am truly sorry. It is to me wearisome reading. But there is no dodging the task, for "Every Man in His Humour" held the boards, off and on, for more than 200 years. Even the mighty Garrick acted in it. Its influence, and that of Jonson's later plays in similar vein, was tremendous. And, on the whole, pernicious.

It was pernicious because Jonson's critical acumen was not nearly so penetrating as Shakespeare's artistic instinct, and "Every Man in His Humour" was not, actually, nearly so realistic as the ultra-romantic "The Merchant of Venice." Jonson, badly muddled by the fads and theories of Renaissance criticism, turned for his model to the same Latin comedy that inspired Udall, and took over the *types* of that comedy, and the trick of type characters, for his *dramatis personæ*. The word "humour" as Jonson used it, does not, of course, mean our humor at all. The mediæval mind considered that various vapours in the brain caused the various traits of character, or humours; in a chronically angry man was generated too much of the humour of anger, and so on. Just as the Latin comedy had been made up of stock figures —the braggart, the clown, the sycophant, the angry father, so Jonson peopled his stage with characters each of whom was tagged (even in name) with a dominant trait, or humour, and acted accordingly on every occasion. He was, really, little more individualized than Good Deeds, or Gluttony, or Avarice, in the old moralities. Indeed, in the first edition of his play Jonson actually laid his scene in Italy, not London, showing how superficial was his conception of realism. The fact that his characters spoke much in prose, that they used slang of the hour, that Jonson put satirical speeches into their mouths, did not make them alive and hence in any true sense realistic. Shakespeare, working with romantic

fable, even with a fairy tale, put real individuals on the stage. He sensed, perhaps unconsciously, that the finest drama is the drama of character, not of types, and that if the characters do not come to life, there can be no lasting illusion of reality. Consider what he did with *Falstaff*, actually nothing at all but the braggart type out of Plautus, glorified into an individual.

How comes it, then, that "Every Man in His Humour" had so long a life on the stage, and so great an influence? The answer is simple. It was easy to act, it offered, just because the characters were types, and hence exaggerated and simplified, opportunities to the actors for easy effects, and stock effects the thoughtless, uncritical audiences could readily grasp. Consider, to-day, how a comedy written in current slang is almost sure to be termed "American realism," and consider the success of such comedies when they are peopled with stock, or type figures, with one or two traits exaggerated constantly. "Abie's Irish Rose" is an excellent example. It is a true comedy of "humours," in the Jonsonian sense. Any band of actors can play it; any audience can understand it, and will think it "realistic." It has, to be sure, a sentimental warmth quite unknown to Jonson, an accretion of later centuries. But at base it is a comedy of humours. In reading "Every Man in His Humour," then, the student must constantly, and by every effort and device, even by reading aloud in a group, with the parts assigned, keep in mind the conditions of actual performance. Otherwise, it will surely seem incredible that so dull and flat a play could have lived for 200 years.

The list of characters will immediately strike you—if, like me, you were brought up on Dickens—with a stab of familiarity. "Downright, a plain squire," "Wellbred, his half-

brother," and so on. Here is Dickens' "Dotheboys Hall." Dickens, indeed, not only used frequently these obvious, tag names, but he was too often guilty of employing type characters. After the cast, the prologue is interesting and important. Like Sidney, Jonson has his scorn of the romantic drama, and its niggardly stage effects.

> ". . . or with three rusty swords
> And help of some few foot-and-half-foot words,
> Fight over York and Lancaster's long jars——"

He laughs, too, at the "creaking throne" evidently lowered to the stage from under the "heavens," and the cannon ball rolled down a chute off stage to imitate thunder. No, sir, none of this for Ben! "Deeds and language, such as men do use," says he, and such persons as comedy would choose, "when she would shew an image of the times"—these are what will make the stuff of *his* play. Realism, no less, a satire on the age, also, to correct men's errors, good, sensible, honest comedy for grown-up, intelligent men, not "the boys to please." How familiar it all sounds! After all, what is this blast but Henry Arthur Jones' pronouncement in the 1890's, that the modern British drama, throwing off the shackles of the past, was going to treat honestly of the "great realities of modern life"?

And, in Jonson's case, what was the result? We note, first, perhaps, that Jonson apparently scorns the employment of properties and stage setting, placing the majority of his scenes supposedly outdoors, on the neutral stage. But as some of them are manifestly localized before the door of *Knowell's* house, some before *Cob's* house, some in a field on the way to London, some again inside a house, he doesn't appear to have improved much on Shakespeare's technique. Perhaps he

asks fewer shifts, but to ask any is to confess that for stage story-telling a change of scene is a legitimate help.

The country boob, or "gull," *Master Stephen*, enters in Scene I. Here, 177 years earlier, is our old friend *Bob Acres*. But he is also a good many centuries later than his Latin counterpart. The likeness of *Stephen* to *Bob Acres* is rather striking, especially when we come to his admiration of city oaths—"by Pharo's foot" and the like, and of his own sartorial attempts. *Acres* is made much more of by Sheridan, he looms larger in the play, and at times almost becomes a human being. But never quite, I think. Yet how deliciously funny he is when well acted! Who can forget him as played by Joe Jefferson—with, as William Warren said, "Sheridan twenty miles away"? He is a mass of exaggerations, giving the actor full scope to be as funny as he dares. Just so *Stephen*, in Jonson's play, enabled the Elizabethan actor to copy every stock boobery known to his age, and tickle the London crowd with a caricature of the rube come up to town. The same thing has been known to succeed in New York City, in the twentieth century. *Knowell*, for all Jonson's scorn of foot-and-half-foot words, indulges in blank verse. What price reality now? And *Brainworm*, the cunning servant, who is as deft and incredible in disguises as *Portia* herself, certainly is no realistic picture of an English serving man, but a character out of Plautus and Terence, chiefly devised to keep moving what little plot the drama boasts.

Scene IV is the first change of locale. The other "scenes" have been such merely in the classic sense. *Master Matthew* (a stock city boob to balance *Stephen*) has to have a line the first thing to tell the audience where they are supposed to be. Then *Cob*, in his monologue, gives an excellent opportunity to the actor in the rôle, talking directly at the crowd in the

pit no doubt, poking sly fun at poets and would-be poets and the new fangled tobacco smoking, and ending with a veritable outburst of slang.

Scene V changes again, and we have to suppose ourselves in *Bobadill's* room. Why is that any easier, or more rational, than to suppose ourselves on *Prospero's* Isle, or the sea coast of Bohemia? This scene, besides introducing in *Bobadill* the same type figure of the bragging soldier out of which Shakespeare made a *Falstaff,* takes a crack at the bombastic, or much mannered blank verse of "The Spanish Tragedy"—thus showing that the play was still popular in 1598. Of course, the audience, hearing this, felt themselves hearing something very personal and immediate. They got a sense of topical interest, and that, to the heedless, still passes for realism even to-day. The satire on hifalutin words, like *bastinado,* also must have pleased the crowd. They might, to be sure, be equally pleased by the bombastic words in the next play they saw! Satire often accomplishes less than we think. A man may laugh at himself without any thought of changing his ways.

Act II opens with *Kitely* and *Downright,* and gives to each actor an opportunity to emphasize strongly the dominant trait, or humour, to the delight of the audience. *Downright,* in fact, is the Elizabethan equivalent of a recent American comic strip character, "The Terrible-Tempered Mr. Bang." *Kitely's* humour, of course, is senseless jealousy and ridiculous vacillation. Scene IV of this act gives the actor playing *Edward Knowell* a chance to spoof poor *Stephen,* and the actor playing *Stephen,* of course, a chance for comedy. Scene V opens with a long soliloquy by *Knowell,* which has an oddly familiar ring. It is the blast of an old Tory against the new generation and their disrespect for age, and against

the whole degenerate tendency of the times. Alas, even in 1598, the old folks thought the world going to the dogs! But what a chance for the actor! He addressed the audience in the thin disguise of *Knowell,* and gave them a little harangue on current vices and follies. Hearing it, the audience probably thought, not How wicked we are! but, How up to date this play is!

Scene I of Act III is largely given over to exploiting the fun in the characters of *Bobadill, Mathew* and *Stephen,* egged on by young *Knowell.* There is no change of place till Scene III, when we have an exposition of *Kitely's* humour of jealousy. After he goes out, *Cob* comes on, and this actor has his chance. On his exit, *Wellbred,* young *Knowell* and the three boobs enter to carry on the plot a bit. Presently we get *Cob's* satire on tobacco, we get more *Bob Acres* comedy from *Stephen,* who even practises fencing apparently with one of the pillars of "heaven" as his opponent, we get more of *Kitely's* jealousy, and finally we get a sight of *Justice Clement,* who is the nearest thing to a real person in this play. This whole act has run without a change of scene, but it hasn't really gotten anywhere, even so. There has been less sustained development of a situation or a character than in one of Shakespeare's "motion-picture" acts, with half a dozen changes. What we have had is a series of little situations in which the actors could exploit their "humours," or caricatured traits.

Act IV opens with the baiting of poor *Mathew,* as he reads his pilfered verses to *Bridget,* and the lively encounter with the terrible tempered *Downright.* There is a sudden change to the coarse scene before *Cob's* house, then a change to a neutral place, for a scene to further the plot, then another shift, for the same purpose, and then a third shift, evidently to a street, for a chance to show up *Bobadill's* cowardice.

Scene VIII is back in *Kitely's* house, where *Wellbred* concocts his not too wellbred practical joke. Scene IX is again a change, to a neutral place, and Scene X is before *Cob's* house, where *Wellbred's* delicate jest is played out. There is even a Scene XI, on a street, before the act is over, to bring about the arrest of *Stephen* in *Downright's* cloak. If Act III dispensed with changes of scene, Act IV certainly does not. It employs, to no better effect, the technique of changing scene, of rapid and frequent shift, so often used by Shakespeare. There is no advance whatever in the illusion of reality. The last act, of course, in *Clement's* chambers, merely brings the play to its conclusion. The best feature of it is the *Justice* himself—and a fat part he is for a good actor.

Here, then, is an insignificant story, rather clumsily and haltingly developed—no better a story than that of "Roister Doister," and no better developed, either, if as well. Here is a set of characters that are not studied from life, that are not individuals, but that were taken largely from the stock types of Latin comedy, and adapted into stock types for the English theatre. It gains no added illusion of reality over one of Shakespeare's romances by its unity of time and place, that is, by the careful co-ordination of stage event with supposed event in real life. Either Jonson had no real conception of the meaning of such unity, or he juggled his scenes whenever that was the easiest way to advance his story because he was afraid to get beyond the comprehensions of his audience. It gains no added illusion of reality, certainly, by a more significant, or contemporary, or emotionally moving story. It gained its illusion of reality, for the audiences of its day, simply by the employment of current speech, and by the opportunity it gave the actors (clad, of course, as all Elizabethan actors were, no matter what the play, in contemporary costumes) to introduce topical allusions, mimic cur-

rent affectations, caricature current fads. No subtleties of character interpretation were required of the players, no depth of emotional expression, only a certain skill in burlesque and the give and take of comic interludes. Larded with topical allusions and satirical jokes, the play moved along by a series of these comic interludes, little bravura passages for the actors. It was easy to act, easy to watch, and it no doubt seemed delightfully fresh and "modern" and "real" to the Elizabethans, in a way we cannot now comprehend. But it was, of course, a false realism, because it lacked reality of character and reality of story. The characters were puppets, the story was idle artifice. Therein lay the evil of the Jonsonian comedy. Its success led to an imitation of those superficial features which made it *seem* real to its audiences, and in future generations helped to fix on the English drama a standard of comedy which "satirized the age" not by displaying real people in real situations, but stock types in artificial situations, who talked the latest jargon, made fun of the latest fads, gave the actors excellent opportunities for broad effects—but got very little closer to real life than Jonson did —and not nearly so close as Shakespeare, even on *Prospero's* magic isle.

Jonson himself, to be sure, did not live to see this. After some years as a writer for the public theatre, he became a director of the Court revels and masques, and when, in 1627, he returned to the public theatre, the taste had changed and his style of comedy was no longer successful. But after the Restoration, it was Jonson, not Shakespeare, that the new age turned to for a model, it was "Every Man in His Humour," not "As You Like It," that helped to shape the Restoration comedy, and the comedy of almost the entire eighteenth century.

14

"A WOMAN KILLED WITH KINDNESS" AND "THE DUCHESS OF MALFI"

Elizabeth died in 1603, and James I succeeded to her throne, to be followed before many years by an even firmer believer in the divine right of kings and the supreme importance of Courts, Charles I. Most of the dramatists who were writing when James came to the throne were, of course, Elizabethans, trained under the hearty, democratic impulses of that age, and these men continued for a time to furnish the bulk of dramatic entertainment. But styles changed, and no doubt many of the plays of the 1590's were as out-of-date to the Londoners of the 1620's as are the plays of the 1890's to us to-day. It is difficult, from this distance, always to see wherein the difference lay, but unquestionably it was there. For that matter, who a hundred years hence will be able to detect the gulf we now feel to yawn between, say, Augustus Thomas's "Arizona" and the latest comedy-melodrama? Chiefly the difference is in shades of language, and of the things which rouse emotion, too evanescent to survive the years. One change in English drama was undoubtedly brought about by the establishment of "private" theatres, in the city, led by the famous Blackfriars, for which Shakespeare wrote many of his later plays. The Blackfriars was opened before the seventeenth century began, with a company of boys, but it presently was leased by Burbage and thereafter exerted a great influence on the drama.

The Blackfriars and, later, the Cockpit and Red Bull were

called private theatres because they contained boxes to which the nobility had the keys; here was the original of the "Golden Horseshoe" at the Metropolitan Opera House. Moreover, the auditorium was roofed over, the pit contained seats, the performances were given in the evening by candle light, and the entire tone of the houses and of the audiences was much more aristocratic, "respectable" and quiet. Women were numerous in the audience, and probably the stages were, after the first decade of the seventeenth century at any rate, adaptable to some sort of scenic embellishment copied from the elaborate Court masques. It is extremely likely that the alcove of the public theatres increased in size in the private houses, thus diminishing somewhat the area of the forestage, and enlarging the curtain screening the alcove. In short, if we could see the stage of the Blackfriars about 1620, let us say, we might detect an early step in the evolution of proscenium arch and picture frame. However, this step was certainly not sufficient to effect any great revolution in dramatic technique. The change in the tone of drama effected by the private theatres and the increased influence of the Court, of royalist ideals and customs, was what is most noticeable to-day. This took several forms; satire, as in Jonson's plays, increased; in romantic comedy something akin to sentimentalism and to the bizarre supplanted the dawn freshness of "As You Like It"; in tragedy austerity and exaltation gave way to the sensational and erotic. In diction, the poetic elevation of Marlowe and Shakespeare yielded either to prose or a colloquial verse that could carry better the style of wit and repartee and daily conversation fashionable at Court.

Shakespeare's plays, indeed, stand out from those of his contemporaries as well as most of his successors to such a degree that it is difficult to comprehend the enthusiasm of

such men as Lamb and Hazlitt, and later of Swinburne, for the bulk of Elizabethan and post-Elizabethan drama. Comparing such a play as "The Duchess of Malfi"—often referred to as a "masterpiece"—with "Othello" or "Macbeth," one is amazed at the colossal inferiority of Webster's work, and convinced, too, that if this play could be so successful both in the private and public playhouses in 1613 (it was performed in both, with much acclaim) after Shakespeare had for a decade been producing genuine masterpieces, then the audiences of that age were not so different from those of ours, after all—of our age, when "Abie's Irish Rose" can outrun "The Hairy Ape" or "The Silver Box" a thousand times. The logical structure, the sure progression, the clean-cut motivation and lifelike character drawing, the unity and spiritual dignity of Shakespeare's masterpieces, not only were not equalled, they were not even approximated, by these lesser men, whose work, nonetheless, apparently enjoyed as great or greater popularity. Above all, Shakespeare's dialogue (which we now read so often as sheer poetry) was calculated with exquisite skill to sound overtones of emotion when spoken on the stage, to say vastly more than the immediate situation required. This was certainly no accident, so far as Shakespeare was concerned. It happened too often. But a reading of the plays which followed his suggests that it was not generally copied in the theatre of his day and the decades following. One can hardly escape the conviction that Shakespeare was a "child of his age" only north-northwest. When the wind was southerly he was far ahead of his age in his realization of what is enduring dramatic material, his powers of character delineation, his sense of dramatic unity and of the emotional possibilities of dialogue. He had his lapses, of course, as in "Cymbeline," and we shall never know

whether they resulted from flagging inspiration or flagging box office receipts. But in his finest dramas he advanced far beyond the point where either his own or the succeeding age could, or desired to, follow him. The reigns of Elizabeth, James and Charles witnessed a production of drama in London almost unprecedented in volume, and enjoying an enthusiastic patronage equally rare in history. The theatre was the major outlet of the cultural life of the times, and it was, as well, the poor man's newspaper, school, art gallery, library and club. All this we can admit, without falling into the error of supposing that the standard of Shakespeare was the standard of the Elizabethan and post-Elizabethan stage, for it most certainly was not. If it had been, other plays than Shakespeare's would have survived the years in the English repertoire. Time never errs in such matters. If "The Duchess of Malfi" were revived to-day in the professional theatre, and played seriously, as "Macbeth" is played, its most "tragic" moments would probably be greeted with shouts of derisive laughter, or else the silence of blank astonishment. "Masterpieces" are not so greeted, for masterpieces endure beyond the age and taste which breed them.

One of the most prolific of all the playwrights in this period was Thomas Heywood. It is supposed he was born about 1575. He began to write, and also to act, when he was but twenty-one, and lived to be seventy-five, dying about 1650. Long before his death, he declared that he had had "an entire hand or at least a main finger" in the composition of 220 plays. One of the most famous, and one of the best, of the 220 is "A Woman Killed with Kindness," produced in 1603, when the author was about twenty-eight years old, and James I was just coming to the throne. This play is classed as a "domestic drama," one of a relatively small

group of Elizabethan plays which dealt not with heroic tragic themes, in the grand manner, but with domestic situations of a more or less distressful nature which could, however, conceivably end happily. In other words, they were plays which made slighter demands on the emotions and imaginations of the audience. Heywood, in his prologue, acknowledges the lesser quality of his play. But it prospered, nonetheless (or is it, therefore?) and went through three editions in the book shops in the next fourteen years. The reader will notice at once, and possibly to his bewilderment, that there are two plots—not a main plot and comic underplot, exhibited alternately as in a comedy like "Twelfth Night," but two plots of almost equal prominence and similar mood. One concerns *Frankford,* his wife and *Wendoll;* the other the quarrel between *Sir Francis* and *Sir Charles,* the adversities of the latter, and his extraordinary proposal made to his sister—that she sacrifice her honor to redeem his. This plot ends happily; the other ends with the death of *Mrs. Frankford.* But that her death rouses the cleansing emotions associated with tragedy is more than doubtful. Even in its own day, at best it probably brought a few tears, and a sentimental sigh. There is nothing here of the terrific finish to "Othello." Why? Of course, the wife was guilty, and so, conventionally, should die. But why does her death move us so little, even granting that fact? Is it not because she is so utterly colorless, so completely unrealized as a character—even more colorless than her husband or her seducer; and because the cause of her downfall is so scantily developed on the stage that it wins no conviction whatever; and finally because her story is so confused and broken into by the concurrent story of *Sir Charles* that our interest never gathers momentum. "Othello" drives straight for its conclusion from the very

first scene, as Greek drama did, and as good modern drama does. But Heywood's play tries for *two* conclusions, of almost equal emotional value, and thus loses all the advantage of unity and unbroken progression. If the reader, too, will read carefully Act II, Scene III, he will surely feel, I think, that *Mistress Frankford* puts up almost as weak a resistance against *Wendoll* as he puts up against himself. All she can say is,—

> "My soul is wandering, hath lost her way.
> Oh, Master Wendoll! Oh!"

But why was her soul wandering? Why was this good lady, whom we are supposed to pity, so suddenly and easily overcome? *Wendoll* has certainly said nothing of sufficient eloquence to account for it, nor has he, in previous scenes, been depicted as sufficiently charming to explain the conquest. It is, as a matter of fact, quite inexplicable, supposing the lady to be one whose conscience could kill her, except on the ground that Heywood had to get her seduced in order to make his play. He wanted to show a novel situation—an outraged husband punishing his wife not by killing her, according to tradition, but by shutting her up in a house with her conscience. Naturally, her conscience wouldn't work if she didn't have one. But, if she had one, she certainly wasn't so easily seduced as is here represented. The play doesn't hold water as it is written. When Dr. Nicoll says that he knows of "nothing more tremendous in the whole range of Elizabethan drama" than *Frankford's* outburst before he goes in to wake the guilty lovers, some of us are bound to question him. The speech, by itself, is eloquent enough. But in the drama speeches do not stand by themselves. *They stand on everything that has gone before.* The reader, before this speech is reached, must have been persuaded alike of the

wife's goodness and the reason for her fall, and he must, further, have achieved a liking for *Frankford* (who is, actually, a most dreadful cad), before this situation can have anything "tremendous" about it. Drama must never be judged by isolated passages of literary merit.

Again, the reader will note that *Sir Francis* falls in love with the sister of his enemy, *Sir Charles,* on first sight. Love at first sight is nothing new in the drama, but it is only a shade more convincing than seduction at first sight, unless it is handled with the utmost skill. Turn to a play already familiar to all English theatregoers when Heywood wrote this one —"Romeo and Juliet"—to Act I, Scene V. Here is love at first sight, also. But note how the attention is focussed on *Romeo* when he first sees *Juliet,* and how he breathes out in tender words the effect she has upon him. Then, as the two stare at each other, bewildered, unrealizing their surroundings, *Tybalt* and his uncle debate what to do with this unwelcome guest. Actually his life hangs in the balance, as he stares, unheeding, at his new love. Then he moves toward her, while she, trembling, waits his coming, there are pretty words between them, and as inevitably as sky meets sea, so their lips meet.

That is how a great dramatist does it—and persuades us of its truth, stirs our hearts by its passion. Heywood, in Act III, Scene I, has *Sir Francis* take one look at *Susan,* and exclaim:—

> "I am enchanted; all my spirits are fled.
> And with one glance my envious spleen struck dead."

Whereupon *Susan,* quite naturally, "runs away." And that's that. Now we can bring about the happy ending. If this isn't Elizabethan hokum, there was no such thing—which is extremely unlikely. Concerning the strange and, to us to-day,

extremely brutal and improbable situation, when *Sir Charles* asks his sister to give herself to *Sir Francis* that *Charles* may be free of debt to his enemy, it depended for its effect, of course, upon standards of "honor" so different from ours that the scene has now only an antiquarian interest. It is as incomprehensible to us as "Cymbeline," as brutal as *Claudio's* conduct in "Measure for Measure." But evidently the Elizabethans found some verisimilitude in it, and took pleasure in contemplating the predicament of the female. The best scene in the play, theatrically, is no doubt Scene II of Act III, in which *Frankford* causes the card table to be brought in, and plays against his wife and *Wendoll,* with a double meaning to all the dialogue, till he can stand the strain no longer. Played by a good actor, this scene must have been highly effective, though entirely artificial. But on the whole "A Woman Killed With Kindness" lacks convincing motivation, it lacks character delineation, it lacks unity. Compared with a play like "Othello," it is childish and primitive, even granting the lesser weight of its theme.

Let us turn now to another drama which has been hailed as a "masterpiece," Webster's "Duchess of Malfi," produced in 1613 or 1614 at the Blackfriars, and later played with great success in the public theatres also. John Webster was only twenty-three when Elizabeth died. He himself died about 1625, at the age of forty-five. His father was a tailor, so that he came into the theatre as a young man probably without any education worth speaking of. He represented the democracy of the period. He worked in collaboration with Dekker, Marston, and other dramatists, till 1612, when he produced his first play written alone—"The White Devil." A year later came "The Duchess of Malfi." We read in so recent a book as "The Chief British Dramatists," edited by

Brander Matthews and Paul R. Lieder, that "Webster, like Marlowe, stands close behind Shakespeare as a tragic dramatist." Let us see.

The *Duchess of Malfi* is the sister of *Ferdinand* and the *Cardinal.* She is a widow, with one son, who never appears, and whom she seems quite to have forgotten. Nothing is said about her brothers having any objection to her first marriage, but they are discovered violently opposed to her marrying again, but without any visible reason. She does marry, however, secretly, choosing her steward, *Antonio. Bosola,* a soldier of fortune, has been employed by the brothers to spy on her, and he discovers presently that the *Duchess* has borne a child, and also, apparently, that *Antonio* is the *Duchess'* lover, and rushes off with the tidings to the brothers, who vow terrible vengeance on the father, whoever he is. Inasmuch as *Bosola* has been seen by the audience to discover, apparently, exactly who he is, this is a trifle perplexing. *Ferdinand* cries, in the best style of Billy Sunday,

> "I am confident had I been damned in hell
> And should have heard of this, it would have put me
> Into a cold sweat. In, in; I'll go sleep.
> Till I know who leaps my sister, I'll not stir:
> That known, I'll find scorpions to string my whips
> And fix her in a general eclipse."

That is the end of Act II. We certainly have a right to expect that after so much fuss there will be some action. The brothers at least will ask *Bosola* who he thinks the father is, and follow up his tip! But what happens? Act III opens, and we immediately discover that the *Duchess* has had two more children! Two years have elapsed, then, and the brothers have done nothing! Could anything be more absurd, or more destructive to dramatic illusion? When that news of

the two new babies is sprung in Act III, a modern audience, even if it had sat quietly to that point, would probably burst into hysterical laughter, laughter not alone at the sheer stupidity of the thing, but at the dramatic ineptness; for if there is one rule of drama that holds above another it is that a rapid and immediate climax must follow the release of great emotion, or else a convincing reason shown why it does not follow, as in "Hamlet." The fact that Webster could contrive and his audiences accept such a fearful let-down as this in the middle of the play shows how little either of them had appreciated the lesson of "Othello," how much they lived in the momentary scene, incapable of grasping the play always in its totality.

But greater absurdities are to come. *Ferdinand*, still after two years unaware who the father of his sister's children is (and *Bosola* apparently having forgotten what he discovered two years before), comes to Malfi without any particular reason that didn't exist at the end of Act II, and by a barefaced, artificial theatrical trick discovers—who the father is? Not at all! Merely that there is one—a fact he might logically have assumed from the evidence! The *Duchess*, to be sure, offers to produce her husband, but *Ferdinand* spurns this easy way to discover the secret. Instead, there has to be a confusion of scenes picturing the flight of *Antonio*, the *Duchess* and the three children; the *Duchess* confides her secret to *Bosola*; *Antonio* escapes to Milan; and she is brought back and imprisoned in her palace, where *Ferdinand* proceeds to torture her. First he demands to see her in the dark, and puts a dead man's hand in hers.

"You are very cold," she says. . . . "Ha! lights! O, horrible!"

"Let her have lights enough," says Ferdinand, and "exit,"

quite like the villain of "Bertha, the Beautiful Sewing Machine Girl." It used to be a common practice in schoolboy initiations to stuff a kid glove with wet sand and place it in a blindfolded neophyte's palm, telling him he was holding the hand of a corpse—or "stiff," as I think we called it. Webster's scene is just about on this level of "tragedy." But more follows.

"Here is discovered, behind a traverse, the artificial figures of *Antonio* and his children, appearing as if they were dead," reads the stage direction. William Archer has pointed out the absurdity of this situation, because the *Duchess'* first impulse would of course have been to spring toward the bodies of her husband and babies, and she would at once have discovered the fraud. But Mr. Archer does not point out *that the audience is as surprised by this apparition from the Eden Musee as the Duchess is.* The play has given no hint whatever of this plot, so if the figures are really lifelike (the real actors, perhaps, with some sort of waxy make-up on), the audience, too, must suppose *Antonio* is dead. On the other hand, if the figures are palpably wax so the audience sees through the trick, then the *Duchess* would see through it. Either way, the effect is bad. In one case, the audience is sent off on an entirely wrong track, and has to be pulled back later; in the other case any audience but one composed of the most childlike and credulous beings would have all illusion shattered—unless, of course, they were merely interested in the immediate shock of seeing bodies stretched out dead, in the pleasure some morbid people still take in gazing upon the slabs of the morgue.

From the fact that *Ferdinand* presently explains to *Bosola* that the figures are wax, it is probable that many, at least, in the audience, were actually deceived. They were willing to

be led on a false dramatic scent for the sake of viewing a few corpses. In the next scene they have a chance to view four more. After the antics of the madmen, sent to torture the *Duchess,* she and her maid are strangled on the stage, the latter screaming and biting, and then a curtain is drawn disclosing the strangled bodies of the two babies. In the same scene, too, we get the first hint of a motive for *Ferdinand's* horrible acts. "I must confess," he says, "I had a hope

> Had she continued widow, to have gained
> An infinite mass of treasure by her death."

But she hadn't continued widow, so, apparently, he killed her out of sheer revenge. Also, as Archer points out, there was the son by the first marriage, and therefore he couldn't have gained any treasure, anyhow!

This is the end of Act IV, and there are still several characters left alive. That would never do. A fifth act was accordingly devised, containing the most arbitrary device in the whole drama, the scheme to get rid of the *Cardinal* while his friends listen from the balcony above and think his calls for aid are sham. This is a device not of tragedy, but of the rankest melodrama. The *Cardinal, Julia,* his mistress, *Ferdinand, Antonio* and *Bosola* pile up at the finish, leaving nobody alive but the eldest son of the *Duchess* by *Antonio.*

Such is "The Duchess of Malfi," the "masterpiece" of Webster, who "stands close behind Shakespeare as a tragic dramatist." If he does, then all the years have taught us of the true nature of tragedy, all the effort expended by the great dramatists of the world to make their people real, to bring about their catastrophes logically, naturally, and as the result of character, not arbitrary stage device, all the increas-

ing emphasis on plausibility, well-ordered progression, the dignity of tempered utterance and human feeling, count for just nothing at all. As a matter of fact, it seems to me William Archer is right, and Lamb, Swinburne, and the rest of the nineteenth century admirers of everything Elizabethan are wrong. This play is not a masterpiece, but a clumsy, overwrought, illogical "shocker," a drama of blood and revenge built to the raw and somewhat depraved taste of audiences who better understood and probably preferred the thrill of stage murder and the sight of waxed corpses to the onward march of true tragedy, to the unfolding of human character, the probing of human motives. It is, certainly, so distinct a retrogression from such tragedies as "Hamlet," "Othello," "Macbeth" and "King Lear," which immediately preceded it, that we can only pause again to wonder if the authors and audiences of Shakespeare's day really understood the deeper merits of his plays.

15

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER

The contemporary dramatists who seem actually to have learned something from Shakespeare, and to have assisted in a true development, were Beaumont and Fletcher. They were aristocratic dramatists, and fittingly ushered in the new era which followed the accession of James I. Francis Beaumont was born about 1584, the son of a knight, attended Oxford for a time, and came up to London in 1600 to study law. He died young, in 1616. John Fletcher, born in 1579, the son of a clergyman who was much at Court, who was the chaplain appointed to wait on Mary Queen of Scots during the last days of her imprisonment, and who was noted for his handsome presence and courtly speech, attended Cambridge for a time, and then was drawn into the theatre. Little is known of the lives of either man in London, but it is accepted as a fact that they lived together, worked together on many plays, and were perhaps the most devoted collaborators in literary history. Fletcher lived nine years after his friend's death, dying of the plague in 1625. The plays he wrote during those years give a key to the critics who like to pick the joint works to pieces and say "This is Fletcher's—this is Beaumont's." The only trouble with such a proceeding is that plays are built rather than written, and their success depends as much on their structure as on their language. A modern dramatist has said it takes him a year (or maybe it is three years) to plan his structure, and then only a month to write the dia-

logue. In the planning of the structure what share each man had no critic to-day can possibly determine. Probably Beaumont and Fletcher themselves could not have done so six months after the play was finished. Nor does it in the least matter. Only the plays matter.

Beaumont and Fletcher were instrumental in setting a new fashion for plays, by their popular success with something that may be called a dramatic romance, something that was not tragedy, and yet was more serious and moving than idyllic comedy. Doubtless the success of their "Philaster" in 1609 influenced Shakespeare to try his hand at "Cymbeline" and "A Winter's Tale." But this type of play was, after all, a changing fashion rather than a dramatic advance. Their contribution to dramatic advance, or development, is rather to be found in their sense of proportion, and of dramatic unity, which caused them to keep the emphasis on their major theme, and to develop all scenes contributing largely to that theme much more richly and fully than the rest. Except for Shakespeare at his best, they were the first dramatists who seemed fully aware of the dramatic effect of the long spiralling scene which puts two or more characters through a changing set of emotional actions and reactions. They sophisticated the depiction of emotion. Their contribution is also to be found in their dialogue, in the discovery (perhaps by Fletcher, with his eleven-syllabled blank verse lines) that the speech of daily life, at least of a leisured and courtly life, could be hinted in verse, thus escaping bald prose on the one hand and stilted rhetoric or excessive exaltation on the other. They approached realism in speech, in other words, descending from the exalted regions of Marlowe and Shakespeare, but keeping to the paths of lyricism and literary formality. They fashioned a technique for audiences at once more

courtly and less robust than the Elizabethan mob. Beaumont and Fletcher, too, introduced into the theatre the note of burlesque, though at first without any success. Burlesque is something quite different from satire. It does not necessarily hold society or social follies up to ridicule; it pokes fun at the theatre itself, at the process of illusion. To enjoy it requires a considerable degree of sophistication. The audience must watch a play which is constantly reminding them that it is all a sham. It is not for audiences which are child-like and credulous. They must have a certain detachment, the ability consciously to disbelieve while believing, to look at the inside of the machine while it is running. Beaumont and Fletcher, then, increased the subtlety of the English drama, perhaps in unconscious answer to the demands of a more sophisticated group of theatregoers.

"The Maid's Tragedy" illustrates several of the points we have mentioned, and illustrates, as well, the tendency of the times toward themes of a bizarre and emotional nature. It was acted first about 1610, long remained popular, and was again acted in the Restoration, when Beaumont and Fletcher's works were, as Dryden testifies, in great favor. It was, however, speedily frowned upon by Charles II—quite naturally, since it depicts the killing of a King by his mistress! Later it was once more acted, in somewhat altered form, and thus continued in the English repertoire till well into the nineteenth century. Unpleasant and strained as the theme appears to our modern age, once granted its premises, the play moves quickly and compactly straight to its conclusion, confused with no sub-plots, concentrating on the leading figures, their emotions and reactions. The masque in Act I, of course, was a spectacular feature, evidently accompanied with considerable scenic effects. "Night rises in mists"; "Neptune rises"; "En-

ter Eolus out of a rock"; "Neptune descends with Proteus, etc."; "Exeunt Ferronius and other winds"—are some of the stage directions, suggesting the use of stage traps, a curtain either of gauze or steam for mist, a representation of a rock, and so on. No doubt this feature contributed to the play's popularity. Act II begins with a rapid-fire dialogue of broken lines, often but half a line to a character. Then follows the scene between *Evadne* and *Amintor,* in which she tells him, at first so baldly and brutally, that he has been made a dupe by the *King,* that she is the *King's* mistress and has married him only as a cat's paw. This revelation is led up to by a staccato dialogue, the speeches often but monosyllables. The idea is hammered home in a manner curiously realistic and unrhetorical for that age.

Amin. Thou canst not dress thy face in such a look but I shall like it.
Evad. What look likes you best?
Amin. Why do you ask?
Evad. That I may show one less pleasing to you.
Amin. How's that?
Evad. That I may show one less pleasing to you.

The repetition of that line, snapped out by *Evadne* the second time impatiently, no doubt, is crafty dramatic writing, and conversationally right and realistic. But there are numerous similar instances in the play. Immediately after, when *Amintor* has at last got the idea through his bewildered brain that his new wife will have none of him that night, she exclaims:

"To-night!
You talk as if you thought I would hereafter."

That "To-night!" is flung out with just the accent of normal

speech. Still later, in this long and yet keenly moving scene, *Evadne* at last confesses who her lover is.

Evad. Why, it is the King.
Amin. The King!
Evad. What will you do now?
Amin. 'Tis not the King!
Evad. What did he make this match for, dull Amintor?

Here again is no rhetoric, but the authentic accent of conversation. By no means all of the play is thus free of rhetoric, of course, but much of it is, and at moments, too, when the drama is most helped by the ease and speed and realism of such utterance.

Amintor's acceptance of his ignominious and horrible position is carefully motivated both in his own rather weak character and in his awe at the divinity of kingship, and when the scene is reached between him and *Melantius,* his friend, the man of action who shoulders the task of revenge, the passage takes up more than half the act, as the two men veer and change in their attitude one toward the other with the developing situation. This is not a scene dropped in to speed along a story. It is a scene out of which all possible emotional juice is squeezed, which advances the story by being, itself, evolving drama. The last act, to be sure, in which the deaths of *Aspatia, Evadne* and *Amintor* are all brought about, is tainted with the ridiculousness of the "tragedies of blood"—as the entire drama is tainted with the faint putrescence of its theme. It seems always to be characteristic of drama that when strong emotions are demanded they are most readily found in situations involving moral obliquity, and when a people increase in sophistication the obliquity required to furnish them with thrills in the theatre grows correspondingly

greater. It is not at all surprising, therefore, to find in the drama which followed Shakespeare, increasingly written for a Court audience, increasingly bizarre and morally unpleasant themes.

But in any historical study of the drama we cannot very well dodge an important play because of its theme; the very choice of theme being itself of historical importance. Nor does the theme have much if anything to do with the technical merits or interest of a drama. A play like "The Maid's Tragedy" is an excellent example of an evolving dramatic style in dialogue—the approach of blank verse toward a kind of courtly and polished and yet conversational prose; and of the increased attention paid to the single scene, thus shifting the emphasis from narrative on the stage, from story telling, to a fuller and richer exhibition of characters reacting one on another.

A failure in the theatre, however, may sometimes be of as much interest as a success, and it would be wise to read rather carefully Beaumont and Fletcher's burlesque comedy, "The Knight of the Burning Pestle," which was produced supposedly in 1611, and was, according to contemporary record, a complete failure—a "flop" as Broadway would say now. It is, of course, difficult enough to say always why contemporary plays fail, and no doubt impossible to say surely why one failed more than 300 years ago. It may be merely because "The Knight of the Burning Pestle" is a poor play. Like Queen Victoria at Palmerston's joke, the London audience was not amused. But Burre, who published the text in 1613, said that "the world for want of judgment or not understanding the privy mark of irony about it (which showed it was no offspring of any vulgar brain) utterly rejected it." This seems to indicate that Beaumont and

Fletcher were attempting something which was over the heads of the crowd, but which a certain limited number of people—Burre, the stationer, at any rate—found interesting. As the play was revived in 1635, this time with some success; and as it remained in the repertoire of the English theatre into the Restoration, and has been revived by many amateur groups in our day, it evidently has some merits which were not apparent or pleasing to the first audience.

Well, the speaker of the Prologue has gone but four lines into his part when there is a hint of the possible explanation. "Citizen leaps on the stage." Here was something disconcerting. An actor springs out of the audience, on to the stage, and proceeds to interrupt the play before it has even begun! But that is only the start of the confusion. The *Citizen* is yelled at by a woman in the audience (who is, of course, a boy actor), and she, who is his wife, presently climbs up on the stage also, bringing their apprentice, *Ralph,* who they insist shall have a part in the play. This entire prologue is conducted with admirable skill, it is humorous, the *Citizen* and his wife are interesting characters, with a charming naïveté, and we to-day are quite captivated with the scheme, so much so that it was used in 1927, in one of the most popular plays of the winter in New York—"The Spider." But we may well ask how it impressed the audience of 1611—still on the whole a rather childlike crowd, reared on plays which told a straight story with a straight face. You cannot please a child by spoofing the fairy tale you tell him. He allows himself no doubt of its reality. But here was a Prologue which started the whole thing off in a wild spirit of make-believe. The *Citizen* and his wife insisted that their apprentice, *Ralph,* have a part in the play; the speaker of the Prologue assured them the play was all written, and if *Ralph* took part, they

would have to furnish the material for him, and what on earth would happen under such circumstances, who could say?

What happened, of course, was two plays—a light, satiric, fanciful farce, in which *Ralph,* as the Knight of the Burning Pestle, was a kind of Elizabethan Don Quixote; and a burlesque, in which the *Citizen* and his good wife, sitting on their stools upon the stage, kept up a running comment about everything in the play, interrupted the action, distracted attention from the actual story, and of course shattered illusion for all in the audience who had been taking the play seriously. The whole play seems to us now, perhaps, closer in spirit to our own times than almost any other of its period. The story has for us, of course, no illusion whatever. It is a fantastic absurdity. What we enjoy is the humor of the *Citizen* and his wife, their naïve pride in *Ralph,* their comments to each other, and to the crowd, their interruptions of the story, often to the annoyance of all the actors except *Ralph.* The whole scheme is a capital piece of burlesque, that might readily have been taken over by Weber and Fields or might to-day be adapted by some Little Theatre group into a funny bit of fooling. Let them, for instance, start a "mystery" melodrama. Let some couple in the audience insist that their son shall take part. Let him assume some ridiculous rôle that throws the whole play askew. And let the proud father and mother constantly interrupt to egg him on, or praise efforts that are a sheer burlesque of acting, or of the "mystery" melodrama of commerce. Nobody, of course, could long take the story of the play seriously; but nobody would want to. If the job were well done, everybody would be laughing at the burlesque. Something of the sort, at any rate, would be a modern equivalent of "The Knight of the Burning Pestle," and may well explain why the origi-

nal audience, unaccustomed to burlesque, to the shock of constantly shattered illusion in their major stage story, found the comedy not at all to their tastes. It suggests that Beaumont and Fletcher were bringing a smiling self-consciousness into the playhouse of their time.

It should, finally, be noted that the play is full of what we may call local allusions, hints of the customs and manners of the period, that give the comedy for us an historical interest quite apart from its technical construction. If the reader carefully observes the stage directions, for example, and visualizes the action as he proceeds, the stage of 1611 comes rather vividly to life, as well as the speech and innocent heartiness of London grocers. All in all, it is a charming relic of an elder day, and its failure in 1611, we are inclined to feel, reflects far less on Beaumont and Fletcher than on the crudeness of their audiences, as its later successful revival denotes progress.

16

DRAMA UNDER CHARLES I—THE AGE OF TRANSITION AND DECLINE

Charles I succeeded to the throne in 1625, the year of Fletcher's death. Still more than his father, he believed in the divinity of kingship, emphasized the rights and functions of the Court, and increased the cleavage between two classes of the English people. As the stage had always been under the nominal protection of the nobles since the earlier days of Elizabeth, and as the opposition to the King was led by the Puritans, who would have none of the wicked playhouse on any terms, the theatre quite naturally fell more and more under Court influence. Plays were written for production in the "private" theatres, the democratic heartiness of Elizabethan inspiration vanished from them, the spontaneous poetry, the thoroughgoing if often crude emotionalism. There were lovely lyrics in some of the elaborate Court masques. Who can forget Shirley's

> "The glories of our blood and state
> Are shadows, not substantial things;
> There is no armor against fate;
> Death lays his icy hand on kings:
> Sceptre and crown
> Must tumble down,
> And in the dust be equal made
> With the poor crookèd scythe and spade."

But on the whole the verse of the later dramatists, in their plays, followed the suggestion of Beaumont and Fletcher toward an approximation of daily speech, and in the works

of Massinger, for example, there is hardly one line quotable for its poetry. The old inspiration was gone, is the usual explanation. But that will not quite do. Shirley, certainly, could have written poetic drama, but in such comedies as "Hyde Park" and "The Lady of Pleasure" he chose not to. Massinger, who fashioned his blank verse so that it falls easily on the actor's tongue, and who fashioned his plays so that they move swiftly and clearly, could probably—we cannot help feeling—have written as poetic lines, had he chosen, as several of the lesser Elizabethans. It appears, rather, that the Caroline audiences for whom Shirley and Massinger wrote no longer cared for poetry on the stage, nor the show of great passions. They wanted comedy, they wanted the pleasure of such realism as the stage could then provide, and they wanted the titillation of erotic themes, loose language for its own sake, a new thrill, a fresh excitement or topic for gossip. It was a continuation of the process of sophistication, and its analogy is not unknown to the New York of the twentieth century. No doubt, too, it hastened the closing of all the theatres by Cromwell, in 1642.

But to the student of the acted drama the period is not so bare of interest as it appears to be for the literary critics, if only because of the plays of Philip Massinger (1583-1638). "A New Way to Pay Old Debts" was published in 1633. It was already popular on the stage, and remained so till far into the nineteenth century. It was in the repertoire of Edwin Booth, and even Walter Hampden revived it, in 1925, but it could not quite survive comparison with our latter day drama. Few plays, however, of the whole Elizabethan period, save Shakespeare's, have had so long a life on the boards. To discover the reason should be our chief object in reading the text.

The character of *Sir Giles Overreach,* of course, is what kept the play in the repertoire of eighteenth and nineteenth century actors. It seems to us, no doubt, a vastly overdrawn part. But note how completely it is knit into the fabric of the story. There is no "sub-plot," the scheme of *Wellborn* and *Lady Allworth* to take revenge on *Overreach,* and of *Lovell, Allwell* and *Margaret* to hoodwink him, being alike devices to bring about the final and complete overthrow of the old villain. We see a gentleman, *Wellborn,* a kind of early seventeenth century *Charles Surface,* reduced to beggary by the old miser. Then we watch *Margaret, Overreach's* own daughter, an innocent and charming maiden, ordered by her father to violate all her maidenly instincts that his ambition may be gratified. With these two scores against the old reprobate, we are eager to see him punished, and curious to discover how his overthrow is going to be accomplished. In a modern realistic drama, no doubt these two strands would be more closely interwoven than they are; we should not have the alternation of scenes which Massinger employs till the last act, when he gets all his characters into *Lady Allworth's* house, the two strands unite and the villain is overthrown to the delight of everybody in the play—and in the audience. But the theatre of Massinger's day was not yet ready for so closely knit a construction. For that matter, do we ourselves consider it so essential as we did a few years ago? A motion picture story is told by rapid and frequent alternation of scenes. The test is, does the dramatist maintain, in each scene, the sense of its place in the story, the sense of steady progression toward a fixed goal? This Massinger surely does. The opening scene, for example, is happily contrived to introduce *Wellborn,* to explain his plight and the reason for it, and yet to exhibit a lively life of its own as he cuffs the inn-

keeper, as *Allworth* comes in, and a hint of the coming story unfolds. It may, of course, be justly complained that we hear *Sir Giles* talk too much of his villainies; his character is too little illustrated in deeds—save for the scene with his daughter. It may further be complained that in such a passage as Act IV, Scene III, when *Margaret* tells her lover:—

> "Let Allworth love, I cannot be unhappy.
> Suppose the worst, that in his rage he kill me,
> A tear or two by you dropt on my hearse,
> In sorrow for my fate, will call back life——"

we are in the presence of rank artificiality, not romance—we are worlds away from the poetic sincerity of Shakespeare. And, of course, the final madness of *Sir Giles* is pretty absurd, it is neither natural nor theatrically splendid, but a stunt passage for the actor, like one of those florid arias in the older Italian opera. But though these complaints are just, they do not seriously affect the play, as a piece of shrewd construction, a well-managed plot, with each scene carefully placed in the developing story and each scene, also, worked out to have some sustained interest of its own.

Some readers, of course, will note that the play violates one of the supposed "laws" of play writing—namely, that you must never keep your audience in the dark. *Wellborn* whispers his plot to *Lady Allworth,* and *Lord Lovell* does not disclose to the audience his scheme with *Margaret.* We are at first as much in the dark as the other characters. But this seems never to have troubled the audiences at this play, and since the play survived 250 years on the stage, the "law" appears one which can be broken if the dramatist knows how. Readers will also note that the character of *Greedy* palpably represents one of Jonson's humours. He is a drama-

tized stomach, and is relied upon to furnish much of the comedy.

James Shirley was a minor dramatist in the literary hierarchy, but a prolific writer of plays for the theatre of his day, and of Court masques as well. Born in 1596, he studied at Oxford and Cambridge, where he wrote poetry reminiscent of Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis." He became a Catholic soon after his graduation, and in 1625 his first play was produced, "Love Tricks." From then on, he devoted himself to play writing. Many of his plays, which were, apparently, very popular, took for their scenes and people the region in or about London, and the contemporary types inhabiting it. They were a definite gesture toward realism, carrying on in that respect the work begun by Ben Jonson. Between 1628 and 1638 he wrote at least two plays a year, and twelve of them in a row were comedies, culminating in 1635 with "The Lady of Pleasure." This play may profitably be read by all students of the English theatre, less for its own sake than for the light it throws on its own age, and on the age that was to follow the Protectorate, when Charles' son came back to the throne.

The student will note several familiar features in "The Lady of Pleasure"—familiar, that is, because of their similarity to later works. First of all, is the very basis of the play —a country gentleman married to a young wife who insists on coming up to London to live a gay and spendthrift existence. Here is more than a hint of "The School for Scandal"; here is an early recognition in the drama of the social "pull" of London, and an early recognition of its suitability for satire. The characters of *Scentlove, Kickshaw* and *Littleworth* (here we have Jonson's trick of tag names) suggest the mincing dandies of the later comedy of manners, whom

we find even in "The School for Scandal" written almost 150 years later; and the scene in which *Frederick* is dressed up in London clothes and instructed in the ways of Society (with a large S)—Act IV, Scene II—was apparently realistic satire of social customs in 1635. The verse in which the dialogue is conducted is conversational, easy, full of colloquialisms, witty rather than poetic. Finally—and this point must not be ignored—the plot of the play as it develops becomes decidedly erotic, till it culminates in a situation which would be positively obnoxious if the characters had for us as much reality as Shakespeare's people do. But so callously and even casually does *Lady Bornwell* carry out her plan that it becomes more than a trifle inhuman. There is a hardness about it which suggests a social world outside of our experience, calmly enjoying a taint of corruption which to us to-day would be anything but a matter for mirth. Whether that taint of corruption was a true reflection of aristocratic London life we do not have to decide. Some of it may have been a foreign fashion, imported from the Continent. Certainly the New York stage of 1928 was hardly a reflection of the life of America in that year. But, in its obsession with sex themes, and perverse sensationalism, often under the guise of "realism," it was symptomatic of a somewhat abnormal and unhealthy over-sophistication. Just so the drama which followed the age of Shakespeare, and may be fairly represented in the age of Charles I by Shirley's "The Lady of Pleasure," was symptomatic of an abnormal appetite for erotic themes, for sensationalism, and for pictures of the near and familiar rather than the heroic or poetic. And just as in New York in the late 1920's, there was a great to-do about "cleaning up the stage," so in London in 1642, when Cromwell and the Puritans came into power, the same effort was made

—though with considerably greater temporary success. For the Puritans "cleaned up" the theatres by locking all the doors and making any further acting of plays a crime. The most productive and important period in the history of the English stage—at any rate until our own era—came to an abrupt close after something over fifty years, by the practically complete cessation of dramatic production.

Charles II ushered in the Restoration, in 1660, by reopening the playhouse, and almost immediately the far-famed Restoration comedy was born. Looking at the plays of Shakespeare, and then at a Restoration comedy, a great gulf seems to yawn between them. The Protectorate seems to be an unbridged chasm between two different worlds. It is only too easy to assume, therefore, that there was something "un-English" about the comedy of manners; that its glittering corruption, its easy wit and erotic taint, were somehow mysteriously brought from France by Charles II and his courtiers; that it was a kind of alien current in the main stream of our literature. Nothing could be farther from the facts, of course, and the reason the misunderstanding ever arose was not because the Restoration dramatists borrowed plots from Molière, but because the more superficial critics did not take the trouble to read the dramas which were produced in the London theatres during the reign of Charles I, and would not admit, either, that in earlier and still too much admired plays, such even as "The Duchess of Malfi," lay the seeds of sensationalism and moral callousness which flowered in the Restoration. That is why, in our present study, Shirley's "Lady of Pleasure" receives so much attention. If you have it clearly in mind, the closing of the theatres from 1642 to 1660 is hardly more than a summer layoff. Certainly it is no yawning gulf. We go from the age of Charles I to the age

of his son, not into another world, but into a society, and a drama, which we feel definitely to have evolved one from the other. The Restoration comedy is not "un-English," and assuredly it is not French. It is, to any one familiar with Caroline drama, unmistakably English and in nothing more so than its callous eroticism. That may not be acceptable doctrine to our Anglo-Saxon complacency, but facts are facts—even in the theatre.

17

THE RESTORATION

Backgrounds

The term Restoration Drama is generally applied not only to the drama which was written during the actual Restoration, but to that which was written in the Restoration manner and spirit during the succeeding years, or, roughly, until about 1700. In this forty-year period was produced some of the most brilliant comedy in the whole range of English dramatic literature; the physical playhouse underwent many developments; and a social era of rather extraordinary contrasts found an almost perfect reflection on the stage. Indeed, it is seldom in history that the theatre so directly mirrors the society it caters to as it did in the Restoration. The reason is not far to seek. "The drama's laws the drama's patrons give" —and during this period there were but two theatres in London presenting English drama (indeed, from 1682 to 1695 only one), which were patronized almost exclusively by the Court and the Cavaliers. Never was the English theatre so undemocratic, so much the plaything of a single social set. It existed solely to please this set, held the mirror up exclusively to their nature when it was realistic, reflected their fads and sentimentalities when it was romantic. And because this set was keenly awake to style—if to not much else—the mirror had to be highly polished. No blurred images could be tolerated. The result was a glittering reflection of a social epoch. Whether we like or approve of the epoch is beside the

point. We are bound to admire, as students of drama, the way in which it was caught on the stage.

But before discussing the content and manner of the Restoration drama, we must first look briefly at the changes in the physical playhouse. To grasp them in detail, it would be necessary to study first the production of the Court masques during the reigns of James I and Charles I, and then the growth of scenic art on the Continent, particularly in France and Italy. But it will have to suffice to say here that the earlier English Court masques, especially those designed by Inigo Jones, employed scenery and more or less elaborate "machines" for creating tableaux. Inigo Jones especially, who was familiar with Continental developments, worked out stage sets with wing pieces or flats, one behind the other, thrust in from the sides, behind a proscenium frame, and with a back drop painted in perspective to continue the illusion. Thus the use of scenery behind a proscenium arch was not unknown in England before the Restoration. But it was not employed to any extent in the public theatres, which still, apparently, displayed more or less the stage of Shakespeare.

When, however, Charles II came to the throne, an avowed patron of the theatre and an admirer of things French as well, it was only natural that Court and Continental influences affected the playhouse. At first plays began again in the old theatres, but almost immediately Charles licensed two companies, and two only, and two new theatres were built for them. One was managed by D'Avenant, who had been active in the pre-Commonwealth playhouse, one by Killigrew. The nucleus of the companies must have been actors who had received their training from players of the older day, or who had even played before 1642. The first dramas presented were older plays written for the pre-Commonwealth stage.

The result of this birth of a new theatre out of an older one was, naturally, a mixture of old and new. There was a proscenium arch, with painted scenery set behind it, as in the older Court masques and in the newer Continental theatres; but in front of this proscenium was a wide "apron" with entrance and exit doors on either side, and windows above. In short, the rear half of the stage was the Elizabethan alcove enlarged to the full diameter of the stage and framed by a proscenium, and the front half was the bare platform of Elizabeth's day, provided with doors of its own. There was a curtain at the proscenium, as there had been over the alcove, but it is significant that some years went by before this curtain was much used. It was drawn when the play began, and closed at the very end. It was not much used to mark scenes and acts. The rear stage was shut off, instead, by pieces of scenery thrust across. In other words, the stage of Shakespeare and our modern stage were mixed together. Each was there.

This has to be borne in mind when reading Restoration plays, or even plays of a much later date. Otherwise, if we think of them as being equipped with scenery, we shall be bewildered, wondering how so many scenes could be enacted in one evening.

If you will attend carefully a modern "Review" you will get a fair idea, however, of the technique. On the whole, it was a sensible and practical technique, and is still frequently employed. In a modern Review, the curtain rises on a full-stage set. When that scene is over, the house curtain, at the proscenium arch, does not sink, however. Instead, some kind of curtain or painted drop comes down eight or ten or twelve feet *back* of the proscenium. From the gaps at the sides come a couple of clowns, or clog dancers, or what not,

and do a "turn" on the shallow stage thus formed. When they are through, a new set has been put up on the full stage behind, the drop rises, and once more we have the full stage in view. By alternating these front-stage and full-stage scenes, the former without any properties to speak of, it is possible for a Music Box Review, or a Ziegfeld Follies, to play fifteen or twenty scenes without a break (except the arbitrary intermission), in the space of one evening. And that was precisely the technique of the Restoration stage.

Only, on the Restoration stage, the front scenes were played actually in front of the proscenium arch, and the actors reached this front stage not by the side gaps behind the arch, but through permanent doors in front of it. When they had gone off, and the full stage set was revealed, this front stage became part of the whole stage, and the actors could advance upon it, out of the frame or "picture," where they could be better heard, and in the candle-lit theatre also better seen. It was a long, long time before this type of stage completely disappeared. In fact, it was within my memory. It was employed during the entire eighteenth century, and, in modified form, during a good part of the nineteenth. The old Boston Theatre, which was not demolished until 1925, had, for instance, an apron which projected all of twenty feet in front of the curtain line at the centre. It did not run straight across, to be sure, but curved back on either side to the proscenium. The entrance doors on either side had vanished and become stage boxes. The windows over them had vanished, and become upper stage boxes. But the actors still, when the curtain was up, came far forward on that apron, twenty feet or more *in front of the set scenery,* and there enacted their more important passages. In melodramas in my boyhood, at this theatre, the "front scenes" had for stage all this apron plus

a space of six or eight feet between the curtain line and the scene drop.

Well, the Restoration actors had not only an ample forestage, like this, but one which could be independently reached by side doors in front of the proscenium. This forestage was well out into the auditorium, where the players could be better heard and much better seen, no doubt, than on the rear stage, behind the arch. They probably preferred to play on it. The Restoration audiences liked talk, liked to listen to the flash of repartee on the stage—which isn't dependent on scenery. And the "serious" dramas of the age were, of course, in bombastic verse, and hence adapted to the declamatory methods of the platform stage. Hence it was that, although the Restoration theatre had scenery, and often rather elaborate scenery, much of its drama could get along perfectly well without scenery, and there was no such sense of contrast between the front and full-stage scenes as there would be to-day, no such sense of sag in the play during the former, no such feeling that the front-stage scene was merely a marking of time. When we come to specific plays, we shall probably find it difficult, in reading, to detect a difference in dramatic importance and interest between the front and full-stage scenes.

The Restoration scenery, like the stage, persisted for two centuries, after it had been elaborated and refined, especially by Italians, in the early eighteenth century. It chiefly consisted of flats pushed in at the sides, in set grooves, and painted in perspective, this perspective being continued upon a back cloth. For the most part, the flats projected just far enough into view to screen the wings, and left the back stage clear for action. But they could be pushed clear in till they met in the centre. Apparently this was most frequently done with the first flats, just behind the proscenium. They were

pushed together to close a scene, thus shutting out the rear stage from view, and by being painted as the outside of a house, or whatever was appropriate, they formed a scenic background for the next scene, played on the forestage or apron. When the third scene was ready to begin, they were slid open again, the forestage sank into the whole picture, losing its identity, and the play went on. Often, in Restoration plays, these flats opened with the actors still on the apron. They simply moved from one scene into the next without going off the stage at all. It was even not uncommon to employ the flats as a door. By pushing them apart, actors on the apron were imagined to enter a house or room behind. Finally, the second, third or fourth set of flats could be used to screen off the rear stage (though, of course, progressively less of it). As each of the flats could be painted differently, it was entirely possible to have several different backings for the forestage scenes.

Accordingly, the Restoration drama, while it employed scenery (and in its operas and spectacles elaborate scenery), managed to do so without any sacrifice of speed; the technique was flexible, the dramatists could write in as many scenes as Shakespeare if they chose (and some of them did choose), and the actors could still employ the declamation of the platform stage, and win the intimacy of close contact with their audience.

There was one other physical feature of the Restoration theatre which cannot be overlooked; its influence on drama was too profound. After the reopening of the theatres in 1660, women's parts were played by women, not boys and young men. Making all allowances for the fact that elder audiences were accustomed to the male impersonators, and even in the time of Charles I, once violently objected to

the experiment of importing French actresses, we still cannot escape the conviction that people then were not so different from people to-day, and could never have been so deeply stirred by a male impersonator as by a genuine actress. As soon as women took their place on the stage, it was inevitable that a new emphasis would be placed on what we now dub "sex appeal" in drama, that the stage scenes between men and women would have a more realistic appeal, even that the "new freedom" would show traces of eroticism. Had the Court of Charles II been much less corrupt than it was, this would have happened. It was also inevitable that with real actresses on the stage, there would be more parts written for women, a less masculine type of drama, and in time a distinct emphasis on the suffering heroine, on tears and sentiment. It is not, perhaps, sufficiently realized by most theatrical historians that the coming of women into the English green room at the time that modern drama may be said to have begun was not a mere coincidence. Their coming opened a new range of interest and of realistic illusion.

So much for the physical theatre. It is necessary now to discuss briefly the social background of Restoration drama. Much has been written on the subject, which the student can easily search out for himself. But the point we must here bear in mind, as we read certain plays, is that those plays are an integral, an inseparable part of that background, and must not be judged by any moral standards, or even standards of taste, which we live by to-day. As students of drama, we see in them a reflection of London Court society in the latter half of the seventeenth century, we judge them as products of this society, and visualize them as acted before an audience composed exclusively of this society.

Charles II was an elegant, easy-going, witty, corrupt man. Perhaps the word corrupt is not quite the right one. He was less corrupt than unmoral. Like monarch, like Court. Many of his Court had been with him to France in exile. Those who hadn't had suffered all sorts of repressions during the Commonwealth—one of the more trying being the suppression of the theatre. There had been six or more theatres in the smaller London of 1600, patronized by all classes. Now Charles dictated that there should be but two, and yet Pepys and others record over and over the fact that when one of them was full, the other was nearly empty. This can mean only one thing—the rest of London, by and large, didn't go to the theatre in the Restoration. Only what we should now call Society went. The theatre was their toy, their meeting place, their chosen form of public amusement. Doubtless they didn't want anybody else in it—except the ladies of pleasure. And quite naturally they *did* want in it plays which appealed to them.

You and I to-day would not be content with a diet of plays written in the 1890's, nor would a New York audience be content with the type of play that might delight a rural audience. As soon as the theatres reopened in 1660, then, a need was felt by this sophisticated social set led by Charles II for a new style of play adapted to the new age and its peculiar tastes. And within four years it came.

George Etherege—later Sir George—was the father of the Comedy of Manners, the peculiar contribution of the Restoration to our enduring dramatic literature. His first play, "Love in a Tub," was produced in 1664, and instantly recognized for what it was—a fitting mirror of the new age. It was a prose comedy (a few passages in verse were felt as a blemish, and thereafter he, and his successors, wrote entirely

in prose). It was a satirical picture of London society, but the satire wasn't directed against that society (except in one or two of Wycherley's plays), but only against those in it, or those trying to get in, who weren't quite "right." This society had little sense of sin or shame, but an extremely acute sense of style. Style was the man—and woman. Costumes were elegant and elaborate; life was leisurely and calculated; conversation was a fine art, wit and repartee the marks of social election; amorous intrigue the merriest and most important game. And this society filled the playhouses, and rejoiced to hear its wit and repartee given back to it from the stage pointed up and polished by Etherege till it glittered, chortled to see its game of amorous intrigue welded into the merry plot of a play.

That was the Comedy of Manners. Some will tell you it was borrowed from France, especially from Molière. The Restoration dramatists certainly knew and admired French drama, and certainly lifted scenes, characters, whole plots from Molière—a process which didn't cease with the Restoration. But it wasn't a foreign importation, nonetheless; at most it was an adaptation of foreign styles to something that could be seen dimly coming in the days of Charles I. It would have arrived, after some fashion, independently of France. Very little of it had the deep-seated satiric purpose of Molière, and none of it had his logical simplicity. It was full of intrigue and plot complexity—a relic of the Elizabethan love of complicated story; it quite lacked the cleansing breeze of Molière's fine and serious intellect; and the great merit of its style, its glitter, its unquestioned humor for its age, lay in the fact that this style, glitter, humor, was a reflection of the Court society of Restoration London—not of Paris or anywhere else. As a matter of fact, it leaned

quite as heavily on Jonson as on Molière, because Jonson had long before taught the English theatre how to put "humours," or as we now say, "types," on the stage, and the Comedy of Manners certainly used "types" over and over, only, with a skill and realism unknown to Ben, it drew these types from contemporary life, and wrought their speech into a heightened idiom of conversational talk.

If the Comedy of Manners, seen at its best in the plays of Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve, and declinингly in those of Vanbrugh and Farquhar, was the major contribution of the Restoration stage, we must not suppose it constituted the sole repertoire. Even with only two theatres (and for a space but one) many plays had to be produced, because the audience was too small to support any drama beyond a few nights. Earlier plays were of course revived. Jonson was popular, and Beaumont and Fletcher. The greatest actor of the period, Betterton, acted *Hamlet;* but in most cases the plays of Shakespeare were too profoundly poetic for the taste of the age, and suffered all sorts of alterations, being often reduced to operatic spectacles. Operas were elaborately staged. Comedies of intrigue and of "humours" less polished than the manners school were written. And, finally, there was developed a type of play known as the heroic tragedy—which to us now seems neither heroic nor tragic. At first these plays were written in rhymed couplets, a style obviously taken over from France at the instigation of King Charles. But the rhymed couplet was never at home on the English stage, and presently Dryden led a revolt back to blank verse. This verse, however, was turgid and often ridiculously rhetorical and bombastic. The heroes were all superlatively heroic, the heroines superlatively put upon and pitiful. The general theme was a conflict between love and honor, and the concepts of

both love and honor were formal and inhuman. It was, in short, a highly artificial type of play, fitted to a highly artificial society which really had no deep and genuine and humane ideals of love and honor, and hence were pleased by cold and formalized and grandiloquent language about them. All the wild, artless poetry of Shakespeare, the deep, honest emotional utterance of his true and human characters, was gone. Rhetoric took its place, with a growing chill touch of French neo-classic formalism, and melodramatic plot carried the story along. To read much of this heroic tragedy would be a dull business to-day; but it cannot be ignored, because it survived as an influence for many years.

As further background to the Comedy of Manners, it remains finally to point out that the loose morality of Restoration society, and the concentration of this society on style and wit rather than "high seriousness," was something more, perhaps, than a mere reaction to Puritan repression. The latter half of the seventeenth century was the age when rationalism began in England; it was the age of Locke, and the foundation of the Royal Society. It was the age when religious persecutions and witch burnings ceased, the age when modernism got a foothold. Now, of course, religious tolerance and a rationalistic view of society are dependent upon a spirit of scepticism. Until men question, their intellects are not free. And it is very often, if not generally true, that scepticism begins among the more educated and sophisticated, and from them spreads to society at large. Immediately following a period of extreme intolerance in England, with witches still being killed in Scotland and America, with the Inquisition still operating on the Continent, the elegant scepticism of the Restoration wits, their complete and contemptuous disregard for the moral traditions, their smiling worldli-

ness, had actually an extremely important place in the rise of modern civilization. It was not the first, nor will it perhaps be the last time that essential progress has come linked with lax morality. It is only too easy for the conventional moralist—like Macaulay—to condemn the Restoration drama and Restoration society *in toto*. But that is to miss something in them of profound significance. In the breaking down of superstition and intolerance, not only are the arguments and eloquence of a Locke and a Milton needed, and the scientific methods of a Bacon and a Newton; but there is needed a sceptical and influential society which is ready to live by its own dictates instead of those of any tradition or creed. The gay sceptics of the Restoration were ready to do exactly that —so ready that they fell into grave excesses. But they played their important part in freeing the human mind of superstition, in releasing the natural instincts, and laying the foundation of modernism.

18

CONGREVE'S "LOVE FOR LOVE"

William Congreve came at the end of the Restoration period, and in his plays the Comedy of Manners reached its most brilliant polish, became a thing most completely apart, a unique and self-sufficient art form. Hence to study one of his comedies is to study this style at its best. Like most dramatists of his age, he was of the socially elect, he ruled as a wit in the coffee houses, and he pretended to toss off his plays as a mere amateur pastime. He wrote his first comedy in 1693, his last in 1700, and then lived on for twenty-nine years. When the youthful Voltaire came to see him, admiring his prose style, Congreve said he wished to be considered an English gentleman, not a playwright. And Voltaire retorted that if he were merely an English gentleman the visit would never have been paid. The incident shows how English, after all, was the temper of Restoration comedy. Voltaire did not really understand it. No Frenchman could. But, of course, Congreve was a craftsman of the first rank, so far as prose and enveloping atmosphere were concerned. He was not of the first rank as a dramatist, because it was hit-or-miss whether his plays stood up in the theatre and held the interest of an audience at top pitch. His last play, "The Way of the World," brings English prose dialogue to the finest point of polished perfection ever attained. It crackles with wit, it flows with easy and charming rhythms from the tongue, it has a grace, an elegance, a devil-may-care swaggering ease, and when needed a biting force and directness that has cap-

tivated the world ever since. But when "The Way of the World" was revived in New York in 1925, and "Love for Love" was also revived, so that the two could be compared in the actual theatre, it was perfectly evident from the attitude of the audiences that the success of the latter in the theatre of its own day, and the comparative failure of the former, was due to no lack of judgment on the part of the London audience, nor to any Puritan reaction against the stage following Jeremy Collier's attack on the theatres in 1698; it was due then, as in 1925, to the lumbering, careless development of plot in "The Way of the World," and the happily clear cut and progressively interesting plot development of "Love for Love." The latter play, in the theatre, is more effective, and since we are here studying plays under production conditions, not as printed literature, "Love for Love" is the play by Congreve we shall use to illustrate the Restoration Comedy of Manners. Students, however, should certainly read "The Way of the World."

It will be noted at once in reading "Love for Love" that there are comparatively few settings; indeed, for the major action, only two—*Valentine's* lodging and *Foresight's* house. The entire first act, of two scenes, is played in *Valentine's* lodging. Act II changes to *Foresight's* house, and both scenes are played there. Act III begins with a very brief scene, "the gallery adjoining *Prue's* bedchamber," and it is evident it was played on the forestage, the flats parting to disclose "*Prue's* bedchamber," again a very brief scene, which was no doubt made by closing the second set of flats. The great bulk of the set for *Foresight's* room was left standing after Act II, with the furniture undisturbed, and when the flats were opened, there it was ready for Scene III, which remains for the rest of the act. Act IV opens on the forestage, "An

ante-room at *Valentine's* lodging," which opens to his inner room (as is stated in the stage directions) and is closed again to the ante-room. As this third scene is so long and important, it may be that it was closed in, not at the proscenium, but a groove or two behind it, to enable the use of some furniture.

Act V goes back to *Foresight's* house, for the entire act.

It must not be supposed all Restoration plays were so simple as this; most of them weren't. Congreve came at the end of the period; he had no doubt read all of Molière to good purpose and grasped something of the advantages of sustained progression even in comedy. Indeed, "Love for Love," when it was revived in New York in 1925, was acted with slight modification in a single set, changed back and forth between *Valentine's* and *Foresight's* houses by a mere change of a significant piece of furniture. But Congreve's play, simple as it is, illustrates well enough the flexibility of the Restoration stage, a flexibility made possible by the separate forestage which was an independent stage when the proscenium frame was closed up, and melted at once into the full picture when the proscenium frame was opened.

As was common in his work, the exposition takes up all of the first act, and most of the second. In the farcical but complicated plots of the Restoration comedies, in which intrigue furnished so much of the interest and in which there were (as in Elizabethan plays) frequent sub-plots, a great deal of exposition was necessary to get the threads together and the story moving. But that is not so much felt as a drawback in these comedies, because the exposition is accomplished to an incessant sparkle of dialogue and is constantly varied by the introduction of the characters who are immediately etched for us in a little scene that may, or may not,

also further the story. The *Tattle* scene, in Act I, for instance, serves both to disclose *Tattle* and prepare the way for *Mrs. Frail,* but otherwise gets the play forward not at all. The scene exists almost entirely for its satirical effect. Not till the second act is the heroine, *Angelica,* introduced—a trick of suspense Congreve may have learned from Molière. This act chiefly serves to bring her on, and also to introduce *Foresight, Sir Sampson* and *Prue. Foresight,* of course, to us to-day is an incredible creature, but it must not be forgotten that soothsayers and astrologers were still common in those days, and superstition of the grossest type was still dominant in many places. Congreve's contemptuous attitude toward *Foresight* was a part of that tonic scepticism which was a too little appreciated merit of Restoration society. The closing scene between *Tattle* and *Prue* is, of course, distinctly Restoration in tone—deft, shameless, comic and completely heartless.

Thereafter the play gets under way, with only brother *Ben* to be introduced, and becomes a rapid series of intrigues which do not resolve themselves till the final moments, but on the stage especially are easy to follow and keep the spectator in pleasant suspense. The conspicuous feature of these intrigues is *Valentine's* feigned madness, to foil his father and appeal to the sympathy of *Angelica.* The student can hardly escape feeling that Congreve owed more than a passing debt to "Hamlet," especially in the "mad" *Valentine's* somewhat bitterly satiric speeches. *Valentine* himself is the conventional type of Restoration hero, the gay young spendthrift with wit and style, and in this particular case something more than the conventional depth of feeling. He reappears over seventy-five years later as *Charles Surface. Angelica,* the heroine, though to a lesser degree than *Milla-*

mant in "The Way of the World," is the self-sufficient young woman of the Restoration who could give as good as she took in any battle of wits with a man. The Restoration, indeed, was a period when women had an independence of mind not again equalled till our day. A woman, Mrs. Aphra Behn, even wrote many of the Restoration dramas—and by no means the most delicate ones! *Tattle* is a satire, of course, and *Prue* a cruel jibe at unsophistication, which the Restoration held in contempt. *Ben,* the sailor brother, alone is something of an oddity in this Comedy of Manners, not only for the contrasted realistic roughness of his speech, but for his blunt common sense. In the scenes where he appears, he doesn't come off second-best, by any means. Congreve evidently had an honest regard for him; he hints a reality of feeling a bit at variance with the hard glitter of Restoration comedy. Possibly he hints at the drama to come in the next century. But his part is well woven into the texture of the play, and probably amused the audience as a novelty.

The dialogue of "Love for Love" does not compare with that of "The Way of the World" for sustained brilliance, but partially for that very reason moves more swiftly in the theatre, can be spoken more easily and naturally at least by modern actors. Even in this play, however, the modern actor who has been trained in our current realistic drama is considerably at a loss, because this carefully balanced, antithetical speech, these polished epigrams, like the elegant silken costumes and ruffs and laces and powdered head dresses, are not part of his inheritance, are alien to his ear. If they are not delivered with ease and naturalness, however, are not wafted across the footlights with grace and elegance and seeming spontaneity, the whole point of Restoration comedy is lost. Played simply for its story of intrigue, "Love for

Love" is largely erotically trivial and artificial except for certain scenes between *Valentine* and his father, and between *Ben* and the two women. Life then, to be sure, may have been erotically trivial, but that would not make the plays about it endure. They endure because of the style they reflected from that life, the satirical point with which they barbed their wit, the marvellous prose they contrived by heightening the speech of the period. "Nay," says *Mrs. Frail,* "for my part I always despised Mr. Tattle of all things: nothing but his being my husband could have made me like him less." Or *Scandal* says, "He may descend from his exaltation of madness into the road of common sense, and be content only to be made a fool with other reasonable people—" Or, again, he asks, "Who would die a martyr to sense in a country where the religion is folly?" It may be contended that even in Congreve's day people did not talk so well as that. But the particular people Congreve chose to write about *tried* to. That style and balance and wit was the ideal. So, therefore, it is a reflection of its age, and even if it is not so photographic as the cursing of the soldiers in "What Price Glory" to-day, it must be delivered with equal ease and conviction to do justice to the plays. It represents what was best and most enduring in a strange and fascinating epoch of English history, the style and elegance and intellectual neatness with which a sceptical and unmoral society replaced the overthrown and outworn ideals of their past, and by which they lived till a new age could be born.

19

"VENICE PRESERVED"

We turn now to a very different product of the Restoration, Thomas Otway's heroic tragedy, "Venice Preserved." This play, written when Otway was twenty-nine (he died, dissipated and destitute, at thirty-three), was produced in 1682, was immediately acclaimed a masterpiece, held an honored place on the English stage for 150 years (there are numerous records of its production in America in the first half of the nineteenth century), and is still held up for admiration by some critics and historians. William Archer, however, calls it "a clumsy, blundering, coarsely bombastic work." But it is certainly an excellent representative of Restoration tragedy, and no play which holds the boards for 150 years can be without some conspicuous merit. Perhaps the student will find most interest in trying to discover what this merit was—I say was, because in spite of the fact that Hugo von Hoffmanstahl has recently made a German version, the tragedy seems now quite dead in our English-speaking theatre. I find it difficult to imagine a revival that would not at times bore and at times excite the risibilities of a modern audience, and I fancy most students will feel the same difficulty.

Accustomed to careful realism, we are probably at once confused by the violations of probability, and the strange goings-on in this drama which purports to be neither fantasy nor romance, but a record of actual happenings in Venice. Earlier, in Elizabethan days, improbabilities were accepted

easily, but here we have something different, something inevitably affected by the technique of prose comedy and the Restoration stage. It wears a certain garment of realism, but ill conceals the wild, romantic, careless costume beneath. Why, after all, was *Jaffeir* plunged in such misfortune? Why couldn't he leave Venice when he saw it coming? Why should the conspirators meet in *Aquilina's* house? Why is *Belvidera* always wandering around Venice at night, to be conveniently met? Why, when she and *Jaffeir* are dragged before the Senate, doesn't her own father recognize her and his son-in-law? Maybe he did in performance, but the text gives no hint. What becomes of *Belvidera* after she enters the Senate chamber? Why, after all their elaborate precautions and talk of thousands of soldiers, were the conspirators suddenly captured by a handful of guards? And, being captured thus, on advance information, how did *Jaffeir* really betray them? Why was *Jaffeir* allowed to mount the scaffold with *Pierre,* especially without search to see if he was armed? Why, for that matter, should *Pierre* and *Jaffeir,* the heroes, have entered into a conspiracy to kill half the population of Venice, out of sheer personal spite at a couple of the senators? Why, finally, should their bloody ghosts pop up through a trap door in the stage at the end, except to give the actress playing *Belvidera* a chance to go mad? None of those questions, and others which you will find in Archer's "The Old Drama and the New," can be answered satisfactorily by a person employing modern standards of play construction to judge by. They have to be overlooked. The question then is —has the play enough else to compel you to overlook them?

Its central problem is interesting. A man loves his wife and loves his friend and his honor. Yielding to his love for his wife, and at her solicitation, he betrays his friend and

his honor. His friend strikes him like a cur. That is his crowning tragedy. The friend forgives him on the scaffold, and he stabs this friend to keep him from the ignominy of the rack, and then kills himself. His wife, beholding his ghost, goes mad. Here are the typical Restoration ideals of love and honor, as expressed in tragedy—love being a physical weakness to which men are unfortunately subject, and honor a high-flown, romantic ideal that has nothing to do with murdering the population of a city, but everything with keeping your word to your masculine friends. One is sensual, the other sentimental. The scenes between *Jaffeir* and *Belvidera* are almost stifling in their insistence on the physical, while those between *Jaffeir* and *Pierre* are probably to most moderns painful in their sentimentality.

But is there poetry in the play to compensate for this? Read *Jaffeir's* speech which ends Act II. Or take the scene between *Jaffeir* and *Belvidera* in Act IV, after she has returned to the Senate chamber (how she got out of it, or where she went, is not now known!). What gushes and outpourings of iambic pentameters, what "panting breasts" and "trembling limbs," what kissings of "revengeful lips," what "groans" and "screams" and "murders"! When William Archer calls this coarsely bombastic, surely many of us will agree with him. When *Belvidera* falls over the trap where the bloody ghost of *Jaffeir* has sunk at last, reaches down, and cries,

> ". . . I have him!
> I've got him, father. Oh, now how I'll smuggle him!"

it is difficult to conceive a modern audience keeping a straight face. Nobody smiles when *Macbeth* or *Hamlet* or *Richard III*

addresses a ghost. They do it somewhat differently. Theirs is deep felt and searching poetry. This is bombast.

To what, then, did "Venice Preserved" owe its long stage life? The plot is ordered without care and probability; the motives of love and honor belong to a peculiar age; the language of the play is inflated and often hifalutin. Yet the tragedy was acted for a century and a half. If the student, reading the play swiftly and overlooking if possible the absurdities of plotting, will imagine an audience seated in a much larger theatre than we are accustomed to to-day, will imagine the candle-lit stage with an apron jutting far forward of the proscenium, on which the actors delivered most of their speeches like orators, and if finally he will imagine those actors not of the type we know and admire to-day, but men and women who were admired for their lusty voices, their flaming gestures, their ability "to tear a passion to tatters," he will get a new line on "Venice Preserved." If you are uncritical of the plot and accept bombastic speech as a stage convention (like coloratura passages in the old operas), you must admit that "Venice Preserved" tears along at a hectic pitch of pumped-up emotionalism. *Jaffeir* and his *Belvidera* especially are pouring out agonies most of the time. Moreover, in the separate scenes, however intrinsically improbable they may be, there is often a showy clash of drama. It is incredible that *Jaffeir* should hand over his wife as hostage, but when he does so it is a showy gesture, fraught with emotional possibilities. These possibilities are immediately realized when *Belvidera* wanders forth to tell him *Renault* has tried to seduce her. Then follows the scene where he faces the would-be seducer. There is the scene of his defiance of the Senate's threat of torture. As long as you forget that all the Senate have to do is to take the paper out

of his pocket, this defiance is a fine theatrical gesture. And so on. In other words, Otway's tragedy survived by its sheer theatricality. So long as the inflated style of acting it called for was popular, and could move audiences emotionally, they overlooked without any difficulty all its shortcomings, and revelled in the tears and thrills evoked by the impersonators of *Jaffeir* and especially of *Belvidera,* for after a time it evidently became the actress' play. It perished when naturalistic acting, and naturalistic play writing in tragedy as well as comedy, became the convention of the stage—even, indeed, when they first began to get a foothold on the stage. It belongs now to a completely vanished past, and there is no better way to catch the flavor of that past than to read this play in the light of a seventeenth or eighteenth century performance.

20

FARQUHAR AND "THE BEAUX' STRATAGEM"

Before leaving the Restoration period, the student who desires more fully to catch its flavor and to sense more critically both the fine differences in the Comedy of Manners and also how the Restoration comedy shaded off into the drama of the eighteenth century, should read one of Shadwell's Jonsonian comedies, like "Bury Fair," one of Wycherley's satires, such as "The Plain Dealer," and one of Vanbrugh's comedies, such as "The Provoked Wife." Sir John Vanbrugh was trained as an architect, and after his brief go at the stage in the 1690's, he settled down to the practice of his profession. (He was the designer of Blenheim, the great mansion of the Duke of Marlborough, and an influence on early Georgian, and hence, remotely, on the aspect of Salem and Boston and other American seaboard cities.) His domestic life was felicitous, his tastes and instincts were hardly those of Charles II. Yet so strong was the convention of the manners school, even after the Revolution, that to a superficial glance "The Provoked Wife" seems quite as unmoral, coarse, and wittily glittering as the rest. Closer study, however, will show that its stage effectiveness depends less upon wit, upon style, than do the plays of Congreve; that the dialogue, for instance, is terser, more like unconsidered speech, and the fun more often comes from the *situation* than from the words. The best of the play is in the opportunities it gives for character acting, and in humor rather than wit. The point may appear labored a trifle, but

we seem to sense that Vanbrugh wasn't quite at ease in the chill wickedness and glitter of true Restoration comedy, but was feeling through the convention, toward the simpler speech and the more human drama which, of course, had to come before England as a whole could again be represented in the playhouse. That Vanbrugh, however, still possessed the Restoration instinct for style is amply attested by such a speech as that of *Lady Arabella* in "A Journey to London," who is expatiating upon the joys of married life:—

Lady Arabella—O, there's no life like it. This very day now, for example, my lord and I, after a pretty cheerful *tête-à-tête* dinner, sat down by the fire-side, in an idle, indolent, pick-tooth way for a while, as if we had not thought of one another's being in the room. At last (stretching himself, and yawning twice), My dear, says he, you came home very late last night. 'Twas but two in the morning, says I. I was in bed (*yawning*) by eleven, says he. So you are every night, says I. Well, says he, I am amazed, how you can sit up so late. How can you be amazed, says I, at a thing that happens so often? Upon which we entered into conversation. And though this is a point has entertained us above fifty times already, we always find so many new pretty things to say upon 't, that I believe in my soul it will last as long as we live.

The easy swing, the comic irony of the speech, are hardly to be exceeded by anything in Congreve, and perhaps it exceeds anything of Congreve's in stage effectiveness, in the opportunities for by-play it offers the actress. With it we may well pass into the eighteenth century.

The first drama of the new century, after Collier's blast in 1698 * against the immorality of the stage had struck an

* Jeremy Collier, an English clergyman, published in 1698 a book called "A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage," which had an immediate effect quite out of proportion to any intrinsic merits of forceful argument, literary skill or critical acuteness which we can now feel in it. Not only did the writers for the theatre feel obliged

answering chord in probably the majority of English bosoms, was quite naturally hybrid. The Restoration had established a style and technique for drama, and it had accustomed the theatre-going public to certain definite conventions of subject and manner. So long as the Restoration spirit lasted, those conventions were an honest reflection of the age. But by 1700 the Restoration lived on only in the persons of aristocrats like Congreve. Middle-class London was beginning to wish to go to the theatre again. Seriousness was coming back into London life. The dry, heartless laughter of the Restoration wits, the passionless intellectuality of their "indecencies," could no longer quite satisfy. Yet the art of any other style of comedy was lost. So vivid was the Restoration style that its stamp was struck too deep to be easily or quickly erased. The comedies of the new century began, then, as Restoration comedies trying rather vainly to reach another mood, or else unconsciously mixing another mood with their traditional style. As good an example as any to study with this in mind is George Farquhar's "The Beaux' Stratagem," written and produced in 1707, while its unfortunate author was on his death bed. Farquhar was an Irishman, without any means of support save his pen (and briefly an army commission), who came to London when he was only twenty to try his fortune in the theatre. His first play, "Love and a Bottle" (1699), was followed a year later by "The Constant Couple," and that in 1701 by "Sir Harry Wildair." In 1706

to try to answer this book, but they evidently felt obliged to alter the style of their plays in some measure to meet its strictures. It came at a time, undoubtedly, when the soberer, and always the larger portion of the English public were disgusted with the prevailing tone of the theatre and ready to welcome any outspoken and sincere attack. Its publication may be said to mark the end of Restoration comedy as a self-satisfied and happily unregenerate thing. The drama had thereafter to change with the changed temper of the times.

came "The Recruiting Officer" (a comedy the American officers at Valley Forge were planning to act when camp was broken—which is a phase of history not taught in our schools!) and finally his masterpiece, "The Beaux' Stratagem." Farquhar was not, like Etherege and Congreve and Vanbrugh, a gentleman dabbling in drama with a kind of insolent swagger. He was an "outsider" frantically trying to make a living by writing plays. Naturally, as any such dramatist would do to-day, he took as models the successes immediately preceding him—i.e. Restoration comedy. *Sir Harry Wildair* is the gay Restoration blade as hero. In "The Beaux' Stratagem" he reappears as *Aimwell* and especially as *Archer. Archer's* scenes with *Cherry,* and still more with *Mrs. Sullen,* are plainly dictated by the Restoration convention of amorous intrigue. Farquhar, obviously, lacked the wit and polished style of Congreve, but he made up for it, theatrically, by a certain gusto, a swiftness of plot and action, a swinging good nature and Irish dash. The play was for a long time enormously popular on the stage, and is still revived by Little Theatre groups, as a representative Restoration comedy, and was made the annual production by the Players Club of New York in 1928.

The object of study should be to detect in what ways it differs from the Restoration comedies, in what ways it is the last of a style and also the beginning of something different.

Take first the plot. In reading, and still more in performance, the plot is here far more important than in Congreve. Partly, no doubt, because Farquhar had more native skill in plotting, but probably also because the newer theatre audiences were less held by isolated scenes of satirical or glittering talk, the story moves swiftly (though propelled by numerous scene changes) and actually strives for what we should

now call theatrical excitement—an emotion of suspense rather than dry laughter; it gives the pleasure of swift action, of swords clashing, of burglars foiled; it has a touch of romantic melodrama, quite foreign to the whole spirit of Congreve's comedy.

Take, again, the episode of *Archer* and *Mrs. Sullen,* which will no doubt give pain to many modern readers, though it evidently didn't trouble our pious ancestors in the early days of this Republic. This episode in Wycherley or Congreve would be an integral part of the play, all of a piece, and treated with dry, passionless laughter. Does it seem all of a piece with this play? Does it affect you as a similar episode in Congreve, or less pleasantly, like a gross episode inserted in a modern story? Is it dry and passionless, like the Restoration, or has it a certain lushness which makes it seem too real and passionate? Is it intellectual, or emotional? Again, contrast it with the episode of *Aimwell's* sudden sentimental reform, and his confession to *Dorinda.* Imagine one of Congreve's young blades reforming! Imagine a Restoration wit having any realization of a need for reform! Aren't we touching here on something which has at times vitiated our comedy ever since—namely, three or four acts of pleasant naughtiness, and then a sentimental reform to send us home with satisfied consciences?

Finally, consider the extremely effective scene at the end in which *Sullen* and his wife are "divorced." That scene is written in the brutally happy manner of the Restoration, but the idea underlying it was not taken by Farquhar from the Restoration, but from the Puritan John Milton! Certainly the Restoration dramatists never wrote of marriage as a spiritual union, never invested it with the dignity that is implied here. Farquhar's method was brittle comedy, but his

spirit was verging close to emotional drama. There was feeling behind what he wrote, not mere mocking laughter; even, indeed, a hint of the "drama with a purpose."

The play, then, posed at the beginning of a new century several problems which future dramatists would have to solve before anything so successful, so artistically complete, as the Restoration Comedy of Manners could supplant that fading orchid. Feeling had to be brought back into comedy; seriousness had to find expression in the prose drama; other themes than amorous intrigue had to be handled interestingly to answer the needs of an expanding and more normal audience. It was a long, long time before these problems were successfully solved. It was, in fact, not for more than 150 years. The eighteenth century was a period of trial and error—the latter predominating. Some of these trials we shall now have to consider, and some of the reasons for the many errors.

21

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Richard Steele

Most student collections of the "best" plays contain nothing after Farquhar until Goldsmith and Sheridan; they ignore as worthless everything written in the nearly three-quarters of a century intervening. To jump from "The Beaux' Stratagem" to "The School for Scandal" is to get the impression that the style of playwriting changed very little if at all, for Sheridan was certainly a Restoration wit born out of his time, and deliberately modelled his work on Wycherley and Congreve; and also it is to ignore what was in some ways a brilliant period of stage history. The period was brilliant because during it that brilliant society not of cavaliers but of writers and true intellectuals who figured so largely in eighteenth century London came into the playhouse, along with the middle classes; because the physical playhouses were prosperous, and were enlarged; because opera flourished and burlesque; because Shakespeare, more or less freed of the incredible alterations made during the Restoration, was restored to the stage; and, above all, because the greatest of all English actors, David Garrick, admired by all Europe, ruled the roost at Drury Lane, and set a new standard of acting and production. There were innumerable new plays written, which, to be sure, have now perished, but which in many instances felt their way toward new styles of drama, and though it may seem from this distance that they

got nowhere, that the eighteenth century went on repeating ancient formulas both of comedy and tragedy, actually this was not so. Differences which mean little to us now were great in their day, and we shall have to look far back into these eighteenth century plays for the dim sources of much which we now accept in our modern drama.

The difference between the Restoration comedies, the typical expression of their age, and the "Sir Roger de Coverley Papers," a typical expression of the early eighteenth century, is surely considerable. Future generations of schoolboys were never set to conning "Love for Love" to test their fitness for college! Sentiment and polite humanitarianism had taken the place of glitter and cynicism. The creator of Sir Roger was Richard Steele, and Steele was also a dramatist. Not only was he a dramatist, but he held definite theories about comedy at direct variance with the practice of the Restoration authors, and though his plays quite lacked the genius of Congreve and Wycherley and the rest, in their own day they had importance, they were a part of what the public saw and were influenced by in the theatre. We enter a different world, we feel enveloping us a different theatrical atmosphere, when we read one of Steele's plays. We are definitely out of the Restoration, and find new forces struggling for expression.

Read, then, Steele's so-called comedy, "The Conscious Lovers," not omitting the author's preface. This play, produced in 1722, and acted off and on for a hundred years, was based on the "Andria" of Terence, but contains so much that is Steele's, and is on the whole so thoroughly like him and expressive of his ideas, that it may fairly be considered as an original and representative work. Much controversy raged about it at the time, some critics declaring it was not

a comedy at all. Trained on the Restoration comedy which was sharply divided from tragedy and had no purpose but to poke fun and amuse, these critics were troubled by Steele's evidences of purpose, the serious moments, and unhumorously sincere sentiments, even the tears, in his "comedy."

In his preface to the published text, Steele wrote—"The chief design of this was to be an innocent performance, and the audience have abundantly shown they are ready to support what is visibly intended that way. Nor do I make any difficulty to acknowledge that the whole was writ for the sake of the scene of the Fourth Act, wherein Mr. Bevil evades the quarrel with his friend, and hope it may have some effect on the Goths and Vandals that frequent the theatres, or a more polite audience may supply their chance."

Well, here is difference with a vengeance! Here is Steele writing a "play with a purpose," continuing what we found hinted in Farquhar. The Fourth Act scene, of course, is an attack on duelling. It will seem to us a very mild one, but in 1722 no doubt courage was required for a man to decline a challenge on the grounds of common sense—or on any other, and to Steele's audiences the scene had more life and tingle than it can possibly have for us. As for the rest of the play, consider its theme and atmosphere. The hero, far from being a rake, is the super-soul of filial obedience, honor and probity. The heroines are both almost painfully exemplary females. The nearest approach to a rogue in the play is *Cimberton,* and he is merely a boor and a fortune hunter. There is a little—a very little!—comedy in his coarse, eighteenth century "frankness" of speech. There is a bit of satirical comedy in the legal disguises and quibbles of *Myrtle* and *Tom,* and some fun in *Tom's* affair with *Phillis.* But doesn't that very nearly exhaust what must have been the mirth-

provoking elements of the play, even in 1722? Wit doesn't crackle. Dashing young rakes and daring young females do not get entangled in comical intrigue. Jealous husbands and country boobs are not made the butt of ridicule. Why, indeed, call the play a comedy? Simply because it is designed to stir the emotions to sympathy, and by a felicitous ending to send the audience home happy. It is designed to show a nice young man, in love with a nice young girl, in such a predicament that you aren't sure till the end whether he is going to get her; but you hope he will, and are delighted when he does. The girl, supposedly a lonely orphan, is at the end, too, reunited with her father—and neither before nor since has any stage situation been devised so certain to tap the happy tear ducts of an audience as a reunion of parent and child.

Here, indeed, is something worlds away from "Love for Love." For cynical wit are substituted the most exemplary sentiments of virtue and piety; for sexual laxity, meticulous and exaggerated respect; but, above all, for dry, intellectual laughter and satire are substituted emotion and sentimental sympathy. Here the reaction from the Restoration is in full swing, and here also we see the stage trying to get back to that emotional appeal which is, in nearly all ages, its basic one, and we see comedy trying to get back to the freer style of the Elizabethans (and of our own day), avoiding, that is to say, any hard and fast rules of unity and daring to mingle seriousness or even tears with laughter.

The student of this play will no doubt find it vastly less entertaining than "Love for Love" or "The Beaux' Stratagem." It lacks the wit and glitter and sustained crackle of fun of the first, and the dashing, headlong rush of story of the second. It is the work of a second-rate dramatist, who, in addition, was feeling his way. But try to imagine it coming

to you fresh, in 1722, after sixty years of the Restoration type of drama. To-day, as you read such a speech as that of *Indiana* to her father, Act V, Scene III, beginning, "If you say this from what you think of me—" you are probably amazed that anybody could ever have been moved by such language. But consider the scene as coming to an audience little used to emotion in pure comedy, quite unused to normal human speech in serious drama, and tingling with expectation of the moment when the father and daughter would be revealed to each other. Under such circumstances, the scene has a theatrical value out of all proportion to its literary merits. It helped to mark out a new line for English drama.

The name of "sentimental comedy" has generally been given to the style of play which flourished on the English stage for the next half century and more, as a result of pioneer plays like Steele's. The style affected tragedy as well as comedy. But instead of getting closer to truth, it got on the whole farther and farther away from it; instead of creating a new drama worthy of lasting admiration, it created a drama which so annoyed a keen and critical, if superficial, intellect like Sheridan that he turned for relief back to Congreve and Wycherley as his models, and made *Joseph Surface* a vindictive satire on the sentimental school, and *Sir Peter's* "Damn your sentiments!" an expression of his own contempt.

To go fully into the possible reasons for this would far outstep the limits of this book. But one of them is not far to seek. Turn back for a moment to Congreve, and study almost any of his longer speeches. There you find a definite balance of phrase, a rhetorical preciseness, which certainly belongs to-day to the written, not the casual spoken word.

It was a style wrought for the stage out of the Restoration fashion of talking in epigram, and the Restoration love of polish to take the place of feeling. It was artificial, yet it had a base of authentic reality. Now read again *Indiana's* speeches in Act V, Scene III, of Steele's comedy, as she talks to her father before the discovery. Here is the same sort of rhetorical preciseness, the balanced phrases, the construction of sentences that seem too "literary" for human talk. Yet these speeches are not the result of an epigrammatic instinct, they are not designed to tickle an audience with sly wit and glittering polish. They have no intellectual appeal. They are designed to convey emotion to an audience. They should be based, to do that effectively, on the direct simplicities of human talk, which a dramatist like Shakespeare, at his best, could find even in blank verse. Instead they are based on the rhetorical style of Restoration dialogue, on something which was never intended and not at all adapted to do the work of sentiment and emotion. The authors of sentimental comedy had new wine, but they tried to pour it into old bottles, and that was one reason for their failure. The bombastic, unreal Restoration tragedy, too, played its part, because that lived on alongside of Shakespeare, and probably the run of audiences found one as palatable as the other. Mostly they considered the actors more than the style of the play. But this bombastic tragedy naturally had predisposed them to accept bombast in the serious passages of the new prose drama. They felt no rising of the critical gooseflesh when *Indiana* exclaimed, "What have I to do but sigh, and weep, and rave, run wild, a lunatic in chains, or hid in darkness mutter in distracted starts and broken accents my strange, strange story!" This seemed quite all right to them, accustomed to hailing "Venice Preserved" as a masterpiece, and doubtless

as Mrs. Oldfield spoke it, they found the ready tears welling to their eyes. As long, of course, as audiences accepted such stuff as moving speech on the stage, so long would all but the greatest dramatists write it, for it is far easier to write than truthful speech. After a time, the sentimental dramatists poured out their sentiments in an almost nauseous profusion, and such rhetoric quite took the place of characterization, truth, and genuine drama.

One more reason for this is apparent from our previous study. Archer, in "The New Drama and the Old," expands it at some length. Briefly, it was the curse of Ben Jonson, and his comedy of humours or types. The Restoration playwrights took over the comedy of humours, and rejected Shakespeare. That was their unconscious wisdom, because to reflect their age and peculiar society they needed dry satire, and satire deals with types and manners rather than individual character. As soon as you begin to study individuals, apart from society, emotional interest comes in. But so deep was the mark of Restoration drama that this Jonsonian adherence to types persisted till far into the nineteenth century. It is visible in the names given to characters, after Jonson's fashion, which you find even in the novels of Dickens (a great admirer of Jonson). In the sentimental comedy the admired types were reversed from the *Horners* and *Scandals* and *Mrs. Frails* of the Restoration, but they were types nonetheless. They were clothed not in flesh but in tags of sentiment. They could create no lasting style of emotional drama, because lasting emotion comes from vital individual character—from *Shylock* and *Hamlet* and *Viola,* from *Candida* and *Hedda Gabler*—not, certainly from *Indiana* and her eighteenth-century successors. Dramatists had to get back to a truthful study of the individual, outside the

theatre, before the drama could carry successfully the kind of emotional appeal Richard Steele probably very vaguely had in the back of his consciousness.

22

LILLO'S PROSE TRAGEDY AND "THE BEGGARS' OPERA"

In 1731 there was produced at Drury Lane a tragedy in prose which ultimately had a greater effect on the development of English drama, and even of European drama, than the plays of Goldsmith and Sheridan. That play was "The London Merchant, or the History of George Barnwell," by George Lillo, who himself came from the mercantile, not the aristocratic class. Compared, in literary or dramatic merit, to "The School for Scandal," it is a pitiful thing. But it was revolutionary in theme, it made a deliberate and conscious assault on a tradition which hung like a dead weight on tragedy, it attempted to restore to the theatre the supreme merit of reflecting the life and heart of the people. In its day it was not only played in England but was translated into French and German, and was admired by Rousseau and later imitated by Lessing. Professor Allardyce Nicoll goes so far as to say that Ibsen and the other moderns owe domestic tragedy to Lillo. Certainly he was almost the first playwright consciously to attempt to batter down the walls which protected tragedy from "commonness," which kept it a thing apart—exalted, remote, too often cold, and not infrequently ridiculous.

Back in Elizabethan days there had been two or three tragic plays of common life, like "Arden of Feversham" and "A Woman Killed with Kindness." Otway's tragedy, "The Orphan," was another predecessor; and there were a few

others in the early eighteenth century. The sentimental comedy also helped to prepare the way for, as it affected the style of, Lillo's drama. But to him goes the major credit. He took the seventeenth century popular ballad of "George Barnwell," which you will find in Percy's "Reliques," something presumably nearly everybody knew as we to-day would know "Maud Muller," and dared to make a prose tragedy out of it. Alike in the classic world, in Europe of the Renaissance, in the London of Elizabeth when Shakespeare and his fellows refused to be bound by most Renaissance rules, it had been universally held that tragedy should deal with exalted personages, with exalted actions, and in an exalted style raised above the level of daily life. Even Shakespeare never broke this rule. The Restoration called its tragedy "heroic" and, lacking the capacity for true exaltation, blew it big with bombast. "The tragedy of the humble," in Maeterlinck's later phrase, was a thing unknown. There was no realism except in comedy—and of course no thoroughgoing realism then, because life is never unreservedly comic.

Against all the weight of this almost unbroken tradition Lillo threw himself. He dared to say that a London apprentice, led astray by a harlot and hung for murder, was a tragic figure, and that his story could be tragically told in prose—i.e. in the normal speech of daily life. In the days when the tragic repertoire of Shakespeare, of "Venice Preserved," of Addison's "Cato" ruled the stage, he dared to challenge convention with an eighteenth century equivalent of Theodore Dreiser's "An American Tragedy." Thus considered, "The London Merchant" becomes a landmark in the English theatre. To omit it in a study of English drama is actually a more serious omission than to omit "The School for Scandal." The latter is an immortal echo of the Restoration. But

the other is a whisper of an age to come—stuttering, faint, not a little absurd, but just the same a prophecy. That Henry Fielding, one of the great figures of the eighteenth century, the father of the modern novel, recognized the merits of Lillo and the new domestic tragedies, and gave them frequent performance when he managed the Haymarket Theatre, is good evidence that the prophet was not entirely without honor, even in his own time and country.

With this preface, the student should now read "The London Merchant," and be prepared for a bad half hour! Unless his historical sense is working under full steam, he will be hard put to wade through portions of it. He may even wish that Lillo had left tragedy upon its high, heroic heights. The influence of the sentimental school may be easily seen in the moral platitudes of the dialogue, the character of the tender *Maria* too modest to avow her love save under the gallows tree, and the general tone of the play which has a perilous likeness to an old-time publication of the American Tract Society. Even if the dialogue were not made hopelessly unreal for us by its sentimental moralizing, how many of the characters would have any independent life? How is any one of them individualized and brought into three dimensions? Perhaps the nearest Lillo comes to characterization is with *Millwood*. Though she couches her philosophy of life in terms we are confident no painted lady ever employed, it is a characterizing philosophy. She airs it while the constables stand around waiting to arrest her, and *Thorowgood* (again one of those Jonsonian type names) is driven to exclaim, not without admiration, "What a pity it is a mind so comprehensive, daring and inquisitive should be a stranger to religion's sweet but powerful charms."

And we exclaim, "What a pity that a dramatist tackling

the tragedy of the humble almost for the first time in history should have been a stranger to realism and honesty of view."

Lillo, of course, wasn't even a good dramatist. He assumes that we want to see *Barnwell* kill his uncle, when that isn't what we want at all, at least not nowadays. We want to see how *Millwood* manages to persuade this youth to do such a thing. That is where the real drama lies—there, and in his reactions when he returns to her. But we learn from the lips of servants what we should see for ourselves, and we see for ourselves what we are perfectly willing to imagine. Lillo honestly felt that the pitiful plight of the London apprentice was worthy of tragic consideration, that a dramatist could look in the very life about him for serious subjects. He had the necessary respect and sympathy for common life, but he quite lacked a conception of theatrical tragic form which got deeper than visible murders and hangings, or of theatrical realism which got deeper than the announced names and occupations of his characters. It was not, then, his artistic accomplishment, but his purpose, his revolutionary conception of looking for tragic dignity in the woes of daily life and humble people, which breached the ancient wall. It was a long road still from "The London Merchant" to "The Silver Box."

"The Beggars' Opera"

During the Restoration period, opera had flourished, elaborately staged and often composed by skilled native musicians. Henry Purcell, of course (1658-1695), was one of England's few great composers, and his operatic scores actually anticipated the future by almost a century. They are still extraordinarily lovely and effective. But with the eighteenth century Italian opera, which was then incredibly florid,

became the rage, especially among the fashionable set—the set, of course, which has always kept opera going in Anglo-Saxon lands, for the satisfaction of its own vanity as much as for love of music. With Italian opera, pantomimes, revivals of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, of Congreve and Wycherley, with the new sentimental comedies and prose tragedies, with many new plays besides still written more or less in the Restoration manner but tending steadily to substitute brisk comic action for wit or satire, and hence to become farce, and finally with fine acting at the two Theatres Royal and the third theatre, the Haymarket, now licensed to function when the patent houses were closed, the London of Swift and Pope and Fielding was not without its varied and interesting theatrical fare. But it was to develop still another type of entertainment destined to play an enormous part in our theatrical history, and which, indeed, is still playing that part.

Fielding and others often employed burlesque for their lighter entertainments, and for satirical purposes, generally couched in the form of mock rehearsals of a play—a trick copied from "The Rehearsal" of Buckingham, produced during the Restoration. But John Gay, in 1728, produced a burlesque of grand opera and, perhaps, of mock heroics in general, together with sly satire at the Walpole government, which was itself a charming musical entertainment. He called it "The Beggars' Opera." The characters were thieves and prostitutes and highwaymen. They discussed a murder or the theft of a watch with all the air of operatic heroes. And they sang no less than sixty-three songs. Gay needed no composer. For music, he had a musician arrange familiar old airs, substituting his own words. The success of "The Beggars' Opera" was so great that for the next ten years "ballad

operas," nearly all of them satirical or farcical, almost ran other forms of entertainment off the stage. Nor did they disappear during all the century. In the nineteenth century, as we shall see, they and their equivalent played a leading part in freeing the theatre from dead tradition. In our own day, not only has "The Beggars' Opera" been successfully revived in England and America, but its modern equivalent, musical comedy, still supplies us with the lyric gaiety we crave and not infrequently with the burlesques of current fads and even with the satire which is a needed tonic in every age.

Students will have no trouble in reading "The Beggars' Opera," the less if they prop the book on the piano and also play and sing the songs. It should be read carefully not only because it was probably the most popular play produced in England in the first half of the eighteenth century, but also because it holds many suggestive lessons. Compare its spirit, for example, its method of humor, with that of W. S. Gilbert. Gay's work is funny, is it not, because of the pervasive incongruity? *Peachum* and *Mrs. Peachum* discuss with the solemnity and concern of good parents how they shall manage to get their daughter's husband hanged. *Mrs. Peachum* tells the daughter, "But your duty to your parents, Hussy, obliges you to hang him. What would many a wife give for such an opportunity!" This is Gilbertian topsy-turvy; this is the sort of humor that delights us on the deck of H.M.S. *Pinafore*. It is the pure spirit of English burlesque. Consider, too, the lyrics, which also have their humorous edge, and which fit neatly into the story. And the colorful characters, young and old, and the dashing hero, to give the story picturesqueness. There is slang, too, in the dialogue, the brisk speech of the streets and taverns. Here, in 1728,

Gay evolved a musical comedy that was a masterpiece of its kind, and was destined to hold the stage and satisfy the needs of English—and American—audiences through various transformations, to this present fourth decade of the twentieth century, and how much longer no man knoweth.

One more consideration. In reading "The Beggars' Opera" you feel, do you not, a far greater simplicity and naturalness in the dialogue than you feel in Steele or Lillo. Indeed, when these thieves talk about their plunder you actually feel more than a hint of realism, you are nearer to the novels of De Foe and Fielding than you are to the drama of that age. Why should that be? Is it not because Gay, in writing a burlesque or musical comedy, felt no compulsion of tradition to be dignified or "literary," or to follow accepted models. He was irresponsible, and he was handling, as characters, thieves and cut-throats who had no part, anyway, in the sacrosanct Comedy of Manners, and about whom nobody could wax sentimental. That was the fun of it. He was just out to have, and give his audience, a good time. As a result, he actually got closer to reality, in some ways, than his serious contemporaries like Lillo, he left us to-day a sharper picture of contemporary London. It was just that open-eyed and carefree attitude of burlesque and musical comedy which made them so important in later years, in overthrowing dead traditions and clearing the stage for the modern drama. So, again, it will not do to say that the drama was slowly dying during the eighteenth century, before Sheridan, and that nothing new worth while was produced. Things, in the old phrase, were aborning.

23

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY—SECOND HALF

Goldsmith and Sheridan

It would be a pleasant diversion, and an essential one if this book aimed at a complete history of the theatre, to discuss at this point the physical aspect of the eighteenth century playhouse, the scenery and costuming of plays, the audiences, and especially the actors and acting. But we shall have to pass on with the briefest mention, leaving the interested student to dig for himself in such amiable pages as those of Dr. Doran or in Karl Mantzius' "History of Theatrical Art." Till the year 1737, though the two-theatre rule of Charles II was a tradition, other theatres came and went, some large and some small—the small being rather the more successful. But in 1737 the two-theatre rule was made a law, and (originally for political reasons) censorship by the Lord Chamberlain was established. The only exception to the two-theatre rule for spoken drama was the Haymarket, which slid in ostensibly by presenting plays when the other houses were closed for the summer. The result was that as London grew the two patent houses (Drury Lane and Covent Garden) had to grow to meet the demand, till by the end of the century each seated over 3,000 people. If you will reflect that such a house as the New Amsterdam in New York seats less than 2,000, and is considered fit only for large musical plays, and that old Drury Lane must have been nearly the size of the Metropolitan Opera House—and lighted only by candles!

—you can easily realize that fine shades of acting were invisible to most of the audience, and it was no wonder the actors, to be heard, had to come forward on the apron and shout their speeches. Garrick, for a full generation the manager and star at Drury Lane, introduced from Italy improved lighting, abolishing the old candle chandeliers which hung over the players and shone in the eyes of the audience, and substituting concealed border lights in reflectors. He also, shortly after the mid-century, abolished the custom of seating gallants on the stage. But this, supposed to be a great "advance," in reality took away one more intimacy from the playhouse, though it undoubtedly made the lives of the actors easier. Garrick, however, continued to play Shakespeare "in modern dress." As *Macbeth,* for example, he wore the red coat of a British general. Correct costuming of historical plays did not thoroughly establish itself till the nineteenth century.

Garrick was hailed by all Europe as the greatest actor of his age. He was a man of many gifts, including those of writing excellent farces and making money. Hundreds of contemporary records testify to his command over the emotions of his audience. But we to-day take the testimony of his "naturalness" with a grain of salt. Boswell asked Dr. Johnson if Garrick didn't act, as *Hamlet,* just as anybody would do in the presence of a ghost, and the great apostle of common sense replied, that if *he* should act that way in presence of a ghost, he'd expect the ghost to be more terrified than himself. Natural acting, as we now understand it, was practically impossible in the great dim theatres of that day, and before audiences who knew nothing whatever of naturalism in play writing. In fact, even to-day, no actor can act Shakespeare naturalistically and produce a satisfactory

effect. In 1750 it was far less possible. If Garrick seemed natural, then, we can fancy the rant or the formalized playing which had preceded him.

So, while Fielding and then Samuel Foote, at the Haymarket, entertained with burlesques and satires, the two patent houses, or Theatres Royal, to use the high-sounding phrase, with their permanent stock companies which every author knew he had to fit with parts, revived Shakespeare, acted broad farces as "afterpieces," mounted Restoration comedies toned down to the new taste, or pieces in imitation of those comedies, put on new tragedies which (like Home's famous "Douglas") were bombastic rant, or, especially, devoted themselves to the style of drama developed from Steele and Lillo. Sentimental moralizing in fiction and drama was not confined to England, however. It no less preceded the French Revolution. The whole temper of the times had shifted from the brittle scepticism of the Restoration. In religion, Calvinism was breaking down under the stress of humanitarianism. In social life sympathy was expanding. Something, too, that was parent to Victorianism was in the air, and led audiences to a curious relish for books and plays in which virtue suffered heroically and was rewarded in the end. The sentimental comedy became less and less comic; it made a bid for tears, which had, of course, to be wiped away in the last act. (And if anybody thinks this sort of thing no longer exists in the theatre, he doesn't attend the playhouse much—nor the movies!) Among the chief writers of this sentimental school were Richard Cumberland and Hugh Kelly. In a rough sense, we may say that such drama was a kind of fusion of the sentimental comedy and the "unheroic" or common life tragedy of Lillo. It was a dim approximation of what to-day we simply call "drama," something that

rouses other emotions than mirth, but stops short of a tragic conclusion. How far the large, dim theatres and the style of acting compelled these plays to be painted in broad, crude strokes, and how far the lack of genius in the playwrights and of discrimination in the public contributed to the result, nobody can certainly say.

But as a direct reaction to them came, in the 1770's, three of the dramatic masterpieces—if not the only three dramatic masterpieces—of the century. England lost America and won three great works of art at about the same time.

The three plays, of course, were Goldsmith's "She Stoops to Conquer" (1773), and Sheridan's "The Rivals" (1775) and "The School for Scandal" (1777). (Incidentally, both authors of these English masterpieces were Irishmen.) It may fairly be assumed that all students of this book are familiar with these three works, as with the plays of Shakespeare. Those who are not should, before continuing, familiarize themselves with the texts.

Goldsmith, of course, was himself a sentimentalist. "The Deserted Village" is saturated with sentimental reflections, and "The Vicar of Wakefield" is soft and warm with the peculiar sentimental humanitarianism of the age. But he was also a literary artist, and a fun-loving Irishman. Too little has probably been made of the fact that unlike Steele and Lillo half a century before, he had the benefit of the new art of prose fiction to help him realize how to get daily life upon the stage with some degree of naturalness, and that he himself had practised that art. The student should certainly read his preface to his earlier play, "The Good Natured Man." There he frankly confesses he was trying to imitate "the poets of the last age" (i.e. the Elizabethan), who did not know "genteel comedy" and tried only to be "humorous" and

"natural," not to set standards of elegant moral behavior. The author, he adds, "hopes that too much refinement will not banish humor and character from [our stage], as it has already done from the French theatre. Indeed, the French comedy has now become so very elevated and sentimental that it has not only banished humor and Molière from the stage, but it has banished all spectators, too."

The same preface might have served for "She Stoops to Conquer." Here, in prose, Goldsmith strives to tell a merry story chiefly for its own sake and for the sake of depicting a set of jolly characters. He strives for a kind of eighteenth century "As You Like It." Though his central plot is perhaps taken from Farquhar's "Constant Couple," *Tony Lumpkin* is Shakespearian rather than Restoration because he isn't superciliously made fun of, and there is a suggestion, at least, of romantic charm in the arrival of the lovers by night, the misunderstandings, and the ruse of *Kate* to win her bashful lover. But, alas, the way to reform the drama is not to turn back to the past, even to Shakespeare, but to move forward into the future. Can it be said that "She Stoops to Conquer," even though it remained popular for over a century, and is still occasionally revived (it was acted professionally in the United States in 1928), greatly advanced the art of drama? In spite of Goldsmith's intentions, his characters remain stock figures, almost "humours," not true individuals. To make *Tony Lumpkin* live on the stage requires a peculiarly gifted actor; otherwise he is as hopelessly unreal to-day as most of Shakespeare's clowns. *Marlowe's* trait of bashfulness before ladies and assurance before barmaids is the only trait he has to distinguish him from a puppet. *Hardcastle* is the crusty "old man" part. Nor can it be said that either *Kate* or *Marlowe,* in their love scenes, displays any

genuine feeling, kindles in us any response. The humor of the play is largely gained from situations of an arbitrary and farcical nature, which lend themselves to comic acting, and from the rapid, well sustained development of the plot. The play is full of good feeling; a merry, genial spirit envelops it, quite different from the spirit of Congreve; compared to the sentimental comedies of its day, it is triumphantly "natural" in dialogue. But it didn't really get the drama forward, because it blazed no new path; it was a protest rather than a promise. Historically, it is less important than the textbooks make out.

If Goldsmith turned back in spirit to Shakespeare, Sheridan turned back (as he was bound to do by his nature) to the Restoration. "The Rivals" is a Restoration comedy mixed up with eighteenth century farce and even sentimental comedy. On the whole, farce prevails. Pinero once defined a "classic comedy" as a farce by an author who is dead. The definition admirably fits "The Rivals." *Mrs. Malaprop, Lydia Languish, Sir Anthony Absolute, Bob Acres,* are all, of course, type names, and the characters are type characters. They stem from Jonson, *via* Etherege and Congreve. To make sport of the country boob is a Restoration trick. But for the wit and glitter of Congreve, "The Rivals" largely substitutes the most outrageous farce. It is eminently actable farce. Even amateurs can get fun out of it, and actors like Joe Jefferson, Mrs. John Drew, and Mrs. Fiske have been able to make it appear glorious. But it is farce nonetheless, and in 1775 it was farce not cut to a contemporary pattern, not dashed with reality, but going back to a past almost a century removed. It was repeating a formula.

In "The School for Scandal," of course, Sheridan wrote a genuine Comedy of Manners. Farce was banished. Wit and

polish, glitter and keen intellectual sword play and satire, took its place. Seen to-day, it appears of the same school as Congreve, only better ordered in plot, unobjectionable in theme and language, and with a certain dramatic "punch" in the famous screen scene lacking in Restoration comedy. But it is of the same school. Sheridan himself, a man of keen wit and superficially brilliant intellect, admiring the devil-may-care way of life and only too adept at it, was a belated child of the Restoration. He wrote by far the finest play of the eighteenth century, and one which may still be witnessed, if actors can be found capable of giving it adequate production, with the utmost enjoyment. But by that play he no more helped the drama forward than you or I would do to-day if we should write an equally brilliant imitation of Congreve. He said, triumphantly, to the London of 1777, "See here! Here's the way comedy *used* to be done. Isn't it better than your sentimental twaddle?" And the pit and boxes no doubt agreed that it was better. But some youth in the second balcony, one of the insurgent "new generation," may have muttered the then equivalent of "applesauce," and demanded to know what it all had to do with the surging new life of 1777.

Of course, it didn't have anything. Sheridan took his scandalous college from Wycherley. (See "The Plain Dealer.") If it was true (as no doubt it was) for Wycherley's day, it couldn't have been true for Sheridan's, unless we assume society had not changed in one hundred years. *Sir Peter* and *Lady Teazle,* wonderful parts for actors, are stock humours, or types, out of the Restoration, the only change being that *Lady Teazle* doesn't go quite so far, and "repents" at the end. Sheridan didn't dare to be completely unsentimental, after all! *Charles Surface* is as much a type as the "dashing"

young leading man of the stock company who must always act him. *Joseph Surface* is a satirical caricature. Let the modern actor try to play him realistically, to make him a serious study in hypocrisy, and he becomes at once intolerable and throws the whole play out of joint. Even the immortal screen scene, which was Sheridan's triumphant invention for untangling his plot at one swift blow, is pure (or impure) Restoration till the moment the screen is thrown down. It is the heartless comedy of amorous intrigue. As you and I know the play, probably, when the screen falls we have a shock of drama, a shiver goes down our spine, and across *Charles'* "Lady Teazle, by all that's wonderful!" cuts *Sir Peter's* deep, "Lady Teazle, by all that's damnable!"—and *Lady Teazle* stands there a long moment while we revel in emotion.

But David Garrick, who retired and sold Drury Lane to Sheridan just before this play was produced, took a fatherly interest in the new management, and cautioned the author not to let his actors hold this scene too long, not to let the mood of laughter escape. *Charles* was to cut in again quickly with his totally unfeeling comedy. Garrick sensed any emotion here as out of key. In 1925 there was a beautifully mounted, silken revival of the comedy in America, staged in Georgian interiors so constructed that the scenes could flow one into another without delays. The producer strove for what he conceived to be Sheridan's original method of acting the play, and caused the screen scene to be played without the usual dramatic pause. It melted instantly into *Charles'* mocking laughter. In the light of Garrick's warning, and this proof that it can easily be so played, the dramatic emotion a later century read into it seems to have been accidental. Sheridan was not here finding a way to fuse heart and pas-

sion into the dry intellectuality of the old comedy. He was not pioneering at all. He was merely writing a belated, brilliant and sterilized Restoration Comedy of Manners, repeating types long set to a pattern and no longer genuinely reflecting their age and its spirit. He put no heart or passion into his play, because the formula prohibited it, and perhaps because he had none to put, and he made no contribution to the study of real character on the stage. The very brilliance of his comedy, however, its vast effectiveness as a purely stage play, the silky elegance of its style, made it, in one sense, the less desirable. These qualities kept it for years and years in the repertoire, to shame and discourage by its chill perfection the attempts of new generations to discover a comedy method of their own; or else to inspire more and more imitations, instead of trial and experiment. As late as my own boyhood, it was brandished by critics over the heads of poor dramatists who somehow wanted more to be imperfectly alive than flawlessly dead.

24

"THE ROAD TO RUIN" AND "PIZARRO"

How little the "School for Scandal" led to is plainly shown by a reading of the plays which followed it and finished out the century. There was no fresh access of comic genius in the theatre, and no return of comedy to brittle glitter. Rather, the influences which had been at work changing the drama, feeling toward something new, kept steadily on. Among the popular dramatists of this last quarter of the century were Coleman the younger, Thomas Morton, and Thomas Holcroft. They wrote sentimental comedies which were appreciably getting closer to drama as we now know it—that is, they strove for some serious emotion, for some truth to life in character and speech, for something vaguely like realism, and also they strove to combine their "sentiments" with effective stage technique. Holcroft, whose "Road to Ruin" (1792) was one of the best plays of its day and was acted both in England and America far into the nineteenth century (Mr. Daniel Frohman once told me that he had seen it, as a young man, both in London, and at the Boston Museum in the 1880's, played by the famous stock company there), was, like so many others of his age, deeply affected by the French Revolution. He came himself from very humble origins, he had a bitter boyhood and fought all his life against heavy odds. He was once jailed for a time because of his revolutionary sympathies. Had he attempted a comedy of manners, or an heroic tragedy of kings and heroes, he would have been writing of what he knew little about. Yet, in an

earlier day, that is what he would have been forced to attempt. Steele and Lillo, however, had by now done their work sufficiently so he could make his plays out of middle-class life, and so he could attempt with hope of success to stir the emotions of an audience by the story of ordinary people. His "naturalness" may have been helped by Goldsmith. A play like "The Road to Ruin," which should now be carefully read (nor will it prove nearly so dull reading as you might suppose; quite the opposite, in fact) marked in more ways than one an advance in play making. Its success was deserved, and its continued life in the theatre was not, of course, an accident.

A great deal of that success, to be sure, as William Archer points out, was due to the opportunity it gave the actors, and that opportunity, in turn, was frequently at the expense of what we should call truth. The abrupt vacillations of the father, between rage at his son and affection, are exaggerated out of all bounds of probability, and smack of the Italian farce of Goldoni. In part that is a tradition from the Jonsonian Comedy of Humours, in part no doubt a deliberate attempt to fit Lamb's friend Munden with a part he could act effectively in a huge theatre seating 3,000 people. An actor can no more be subtle in such a theatre than an orator can when addressing a huge audience in an arena. Broad effects, violent contrasts, are needed. The horsey *Goldfinch,* chief comic character, is equally exaggerated. *Sulky,* as his type name implies, is a "humour." *Sophia,* the ingenue, is after all one of those "come on" young females from the country, directly descended from *Prue* in "Love for Love." *Harry,* the young spendthrift, is more or less the dashing young hero-rake of the Comedy of Manners. So much of the play, certainly, is traditional.

But the dialogue, quite lacking the grace and wit and glitter of Sheridan, or the easy charm of Goldsmith, seldom falls into the moralistic excesses of the sentimental school; it is simple and direct, and has the brevity, at times, of ordinary speech. In its day, there is ample testimony, it was regarded as unusually natural. There is testimony, too, that *Goldfinch,* for all his exaggeration, was a new character on the stage, who reflected something of contemporary conditions. Dickens later did not scorn to use him as *Jingle.* The stage coach and "horsey" era was beginning; and Holcroft had been a stable boy and knew the lingo. *Goldfinch,* evidently, was not a type from the past; he was a creation of the present, though cast in a type mold.

The plot, of course, is arbitrary and melodramatic; the whole business of the missing will is puerile from a modern standpoint; and in the careless way in which everybody comes and goes in *Mrs. Warren's* house, and the speed with which they get from one place to another, Holcroft seems to make no advance in technique. On the other hand, the tennis court scene, and the run on the bank, take us into contemporary London, even if we suspect that the banking affairs are not represented with entire realism. Poor Holcroft knew little of banks! Finally, this plot, though melodramatic and crudely dashed with what we now call "comic relief," is very evidently designed to rouse honest sympathy, to bring out convincingly the good side of young *Dornton,* and to effect a really credible change in his character. In spite of all its weaknesses, I should be surprised if it didn't even now get some slight hold on the modern reader.

For, after all, the spirit behind a play counts for a good deal—which we are by way of forgetting when we study plays outside of a theatre. Read Lamb on the subject of the

actor Munden, who created *Mr. Dornton*, and you will realize that by his acting he not only achieved comedy in these passages of violent transition, but convinced his audience that *Dornton* had a deep and touching affection for his son. Writing for actors he knew, Holcroft must have been aware of the effect which his scenes would achieve. Again, young *Dornton,* when at last he realizes that his actions are to bring ruin on his father, rushes off to marry the rich, horrible *Mrs. Warren,* with the strange expression, "Tol-de-rol." It might be difficult for even John Barrymore to-day to wring the hearts of an audience with "Tol-de-rol," but as the scene is written isn't it quite evident that *Harry* was deeply moved, roused to genuine determination to save his father, and "Tol-de-rol" instead of a sentiment is used from an honest instinct? There is a "kick," as we say, to this scene, a sincerity of feeling, quite different from the routine "repentance" of a *Charles Surface,* or the long-winded moralizings of the sentimentalists. There is something at least definitely hinting at the natural expression of genuine feeling, in a semi-realistic setting of daily life. From our point of view, of course, the play would be much better without the rappings in closets and upset candles and farce of the last act, though that act doubtless originally contributed greatly to success. The play is no masterpiece, certainly. But it is a logical evolution of eighteenth century tendencies, and looks toward a still distant future as much, perhaps, as toward a fading past.

If space permitted, it would be interesting at this point to sketch the life of Sheridan after his success with "The School for Scandal" in 1777, before we read his version of the German Kotzebue's play, "The Spaniards in Peru," which Sheridan called "Pizarro." It would show, perhaps,

Sheridan's fundamental lack of sincerity, as well as his need of money. For "Pizarro" is sentimentalism cross-fertilized with German romanticism, and raised to the *n*th degree. Produced in 1799, after several other translations of the same play had been made, Sheridan's version became one of the most frequently acted dramas, in both England and America, for several years, and persisted a long time in provincial theatres. More than that, it was first acted by the Kembles, with Mrs. Siddons, next to Garrick the greatest player England has produced, as *Elvira*. To imagine being thrilled and awed by any actress, even the mighty Siddons, reciting the incredible bombast of "Pizarro," transcends the powers of a modern—at least of this modern. Yet so it was.

The movement which led, in the closing years of the century, to the enormous success on the English stage of Kotzebue's romantic melodramas was a complicated one. In its higher manifestations, it led to the reflowering of English poetry in the works of Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, Byron and Shelley, and to the novels of Walter Scott. It led Lamb to a revaluation of Elizabethan drama. In Germany it had produced Goethe and in France it gave birth to Victor Hugo. In part it was a humanitarian movement, and was of a piece with the spirit of the French Revolution and the eighteenth century sentimental comedy. It was an expansion, too, of horizons, a break from the tight molds of convention, an outpouring of sympathetic curiosity. It led Wordsworth to the simplicities of "We Are Seven" and Coleridge to "Kubla Khan." It took Scott back to the Crusades and Shelley to Prometheus. But in the popular theatre no such deep effects were apparent, even after the movement had produced a group of England's greatest poets. The plays of Goethe and Schiller were translated, but not produced, or produced without acclaim. Instead, it was the lower feature

—almost the by-product—of romanticism which came into the theatre. Those strange "Gothic" mystery stories of "Monk" Lewis and his kind, full of ghosts and haunted castles, captured the popular imagination, and then the plays of the German Kotzebue, especially "Pizarro" and "The Stranger." They were melodramas, full of color and scenic effects and action, full of high-sounding sentiments of brotherhood, full of tears and woes, and coming out happily at the end. They were not, after all, greatly different from earlier plays of the century, only more highly colored and exciting and romantic. They disturbed nobody with any great sense of change, of difference—for the *different* thing always troubles the larger public. And if Sheridan had been thoroughgoing in his repudiation of sentimentality, he surely would never have made his version of "Pizarro."

In reading that extraordinary effusion, again the student, to keep a straight face, will have to concentrate hard on the contemporary theatre and public. Imagine, then, a public trained by their huge theatres to enjoy scenic spectacles and crowds, pageantry of course being more effective in a huge theatre than intimate drama. They liked this "Temple of the Sun" scene in "Pizarro," the battles, the firing of cannon, the glittering Spanish armor and wild Peruvian costumes. Imagine them trained, too, by infinite revivals of Shakespeare and of later "heroic tragedy," to battles conducted in short, jerky scenes, with a few men rushing in or out, or somebody looking into the wings and describing the fight. They could, no doubt, get an illusion out of the fights in "Pizarro" impossible to us to-day. Imagine them, also, enamored of hearing actors and actresses sink their teeth into juicy, high-sounding speeches and giving to them the accents of passion. Didn't they do that in Shakespeare? Why not in

"Pizarro"? Finally, imagine them filled with a vague, dimly understood or quite unconscious yearning for romantic excitement, for expansive emotions which could make them weep or feel noble and exalted—emotions which in greater men resulted in immortal romantic poetry.

Before such an audience in Drury Lane swept the elaborate pageant of the wicked Spanish conquistador, foiled in his attempt to torture his hated Spanish foeman and subdue the brave Peruvians. Technically, the play is childish. It was not an advance, but rather the opposite, in the natural ordering of a plot. What it does is to pile situation on top of situation, in which the actors can be vindictive or magnanimous or heroic. They rush from place to place, intent upon being these things. When a small stock company attempted the play, and the actors had to double or triple their parts, their exertions were tremendous, as you will find amusingly described in the Reminiscences of old Sol Smith, an early American actor. The play is melodrama on a riot, with no true concentration upon one tragic theme or situation, no depth nor dignity, but instead geysers of rhetoric to express the most exalted humanitarianism—so exalted that Peruvians spare Spaniards, and wicked Spaniards spare Peruvians, and *Elvira, Pizarro's* mistress, has a new birth, and can cry, "Now, by the indignant scorn that burns upon my cheek, my soul is shamed and sickened at the meanness of thy vengeance," and a moment later can consume three entire pages in four speeches, all in this ranting, hifalutin verbiage. And this from Sheridan, who had cried, "Damn your sentiments!"

After reading these two plays, representative of the drama which ushered out the eighteenth century, the student may be troubled to reconcile them. Why should the public which

liked one, like the other? What is their connection? And, in the words of little Peterkin, spoken but a few years later, "What good came of it at last?"

The public satisfaction in the sentimental rant of "Pizarro" was not, of course, lasting. Nothing so extreme, so unnatural and hollow, could have a lasting effect. The times happened to be ripe for it just then, when romantic revolt and sentimental humanitarianism came together. The same humanitarianism is really in "The Road to Ruin," without the romantic revolt. Holcroft and his school, writing comedy, not romance, were steadied by tradition, and were no doubt unconsciously working to express their expanded sympathies as best they could in terms of daily life. In a sense, the difference between "The Road to Ruin" and "Pizarro" is the difference between "Love for Love" and "Venice Preserved." The Restoration comedy and tragedy both express the Restoration spirit, but the comedy is distinctly of this world, and the tragedy reflects the Restoration's hollow sentiments toward the ideal world. A century later, the hard-and-fast lines between comedy and tragedy had broken down. Comedy was any drama which ended happily; tragedy was romantic excitement. The new sentimental spirit was in both, but it was comedy which kept its feet on the earth, and tried to some extent to mirror the actual life of the day. It was the latter, then, which contained the seeds of the modern drama, which stepped into the nineteenth century ready to be improved. It had quite lost all the literary brilliance of Congreve and the younger Sheridan, and naturally it had lost Congreve's dry, heartless, Restoration attitude. It had caught, however, something of the new spirit of humanitarianism, and it had freed itself from the ironbound "law" that a comedy must always be comic, and sought to portray genuine feeling. But it had

not freed itself from arbitrary plotting and type characterization. It had not yet developed a technique to handle the vast welter of reality. Without such a technique it could not, after all, get far. It remained farce or melodrama, just as the romantic movement, on the stage, without a technique to do for the new age what Shakespeare did for his, evaporated in turgid rant and bombastic platitudes, at the moment when the poets, on the printed page, were raising it to immortal heights.

25

THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

"The Cenci"

Early in the nineteenth century, Kotzebue ran his course. At the same time, the two companies at Covent Garden and Drury Lane began to lose their great figures. Mrs. Siddons retired. The public grew weary or indifferent. Harassed managers resorted to elaborate spectacles, or "shows." The "tank drama" was introduced, with characters jumping off bridges into real water, and the like. And for three decades or more the English drama was at its lowest ebb of creative productivity. When you consider that these were the years when Scott and Byron and Shelley and Keats and Wordsworth were writing, even the Napoleonic wars cannot account for the low estate of the playhouse. England's great figures did not write for the theatre, though Byron and Shelley did occasionally employ the dramatic form. They were not theatre men; they lived in a world apart. The poetic drama, though it lived on in revivals of Shakespeare, and in wooden imitations by Sheridan Knowles and others, was already too outworn to be a revivifying force in the English theatre. The prose comedy of the Restoration had done its work, and out of prose comedy, reflecting contemporary life, the new drama had, somehow, to emerge.

The student can hardly do better, in considering this period, than to read Shelley's one drama written with the stage in view—"The Cenci," which belongs to his wonder-

year, 1819. Shelley's greatness as a poet, not then recognized, to be sure, is now uncontested. He had a triumphant imagination which strung the planets like golden beads on the thread of his verse, and he had a daring intellect. But he knew nothing whatever about the theatre from the inside, and what little theatre-going he had ever done had shown him no productions which could help him much in allying his muse and his mind with the stage. His introduction to "The Cenci," however, which will be found in the Globe edition of his works, is full of shrewd, instinctive judgment, and shows that what he tried to do in his play was right and sound. "I have endeavored," he says, "as nearly as possible to represent the characters as they probably were, and have sought to avoid the error of making them actuated by my own conception of right and wrong. . . ." Again, "I have avoided with great care in writing this play the introduction of what is commonly called mere poetry. . . ." Also, "I entirely agree with those modern critics who assert that in order to move men to true sympathy we must use the familiar language of men, and that our great ancestors, the ancient English poets, are the writers a study of whom might incite us to do that for our own age which they have done for theirs."

In other words, back to the Elizabethans, not forward to the future. That was one of Shelley's mistakes. Like the rest, he yielded to the spell of tradition, the tradition that tragedy must be in verse, and feeling in Shakespeare especially the power of fine speech rightly adjusted to character, in contrast to the bombast of later poetic tragedy and the hollow rant of the attempts at prose tragedy (also being himself a romantic poet), he inevitably turned back to the Elizabethans for model. But, alas! like so many other literary folk before and since, it was Shakespeare's use of words, his pure poetry,

which he understood, not Shakespeare's skill as a dramatist. As we pointed out earlier in this book, the very opening scenes of exposition in "Hamlet" are tingling with drama, and the words very little matter. "The Cenci" opens with a long dialogue which does no more than acquaint us with necessary information, and then the scene ends with *Cenci* alone, revealing the horrors of his plot in soliloquy. It may be urged, of course, that Shelley, dealing with so revolting a theme, could not—or thought he could not—exhibit the father and daughter together. But the fact remains that not only this opening scene, but more than half the scenes in the play, end with a soliloquy; information is revealed to us, character is revealed to us, not by visible action but by the most unnatural possible form of stage talk, and even what we most need to see for the capture of our emotions in the theatre happens off stage, and is merely talked about. Shelley was unfortunate in his choice of subject, of course. But the choice of subject is, after all, one of the surest signs of a born dramatist. A subject which cannot be illustrated in terms of action in the theatre is not a dramatic subject. That this one couldn't be in 1819 is evident from the fact that Harris, the manager of Covent Garden, refused even to give the manuscript to Miss O'Neill, his leading woman, to read, though Shelley had designed the rôle of *Beatrice* for her. Shelley heard in Italy the terrible and pitiful tale of Beatrice Cenci, and was deeply moved by it. It seemed to him tremendously dramatic. But it was not adapted to the theatre, nor to his own talents. For all his resolution to "represent the characters as they probably were," he could do nothing of the sort. They were Italians of the sixteenth century. He was a romantic dream child of the nineteenth. Lust and blood and swift revenge gave place too frequently to talk about

lust and blood and swift revenge. Scene III, Act IV, will of course at once remind the student of the similar scene in "Macbeth," with which it should be carefully compared. The similarity seems too great to have been unconscious. But how great is the difference, too! The poetry which Shakespeare does not hesitate to put into his murder scene is marvellously adapted to create atmosphere, even to take the place of modern scenery and lighting effects, as well as to create emotion. *Lady Macbeth's*

> . . . Had he not resembled
> My father as he slept, I had done't——

is terse, dramatic speech. Compare it with the speeches of *Olimpio* and *Margio*. Moreover, it is *Lady Macbeth's* speech, not that of minor characters. The emotion is kept concentrated in the chief figures. We visibly sense *Macbeth's* breakdown following the deed; and then comes the knocking, which no stage directions, but only the ringing, ominous sound in the theatre itself, can possibly realize, building up to that superb outcry at the end—

> Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst!

Here, then, in "Macbeth," is a situation fully worked out in terms of the theatre, to give us the thrill of reality, and though the poetry helps, it helps because it is so perfectly adapted in feeling, in terseness, in descriptive power, to clothe the firm framework of dramatic structure. Beside it Shelley's similar scene seems pitifully weak and comes to a lame conclusion. It has not been concentrated on *Beatrice,* and does not effectively reveal her changing emotions as the deed progresses, nor her pitiful calm when it is over.

That Shelley had in mind the pity of her plight and her splendid, defiant acceptance of her final fate, is quite evident. But he did not know how to concentrate on these things and show them rather in tersely wrought scenes of action than in lengthy speeches and soliloquies. He was ignorant of the practical theatre, to start with, and he was in common with his age obsessed with Shakespeare's poetry and blind to Shakespeare's dramatic structure. He believed it was the poetry which made the plays great drama, when actually it was the union of the poetry with structure. Nor did he sense the fact that by 1819 poetry was no longer the natural and effective medium for stage speech, and that he was, actually, attempting to write an Elizabethan revenge tragedy two centuries after its time. "The Cenci" is interesting because it is the work of one of England's greatest poets, and also because it was one of the first of a long series of "closet dramas" (some of which now and then crept out upon the stage) by other poets and near poets during almost the entire nineteenth century, which attempted under the baleful influence of Shakespeare and the grand tradition to dam with iambic pentameters the irresistible stream of dramatic progress toward a more naturalistic speech and the modern drama.

26

MADAME VESTRIS AND "LONDON ASSURANCE"

The nineteenth century, for more than half its course, has long been regarded as the most barren period of the English theatre, and naturally a barren period in the American theatre, which had not produced a native play, on an American theme, till Royal Tyler's "The Contrast" in 1787, and which for years thereafter secured most of its actors and the bulk of its repertoire from England. But it is only in recent years that we have begun to understand the causes for that barrenness, and to see what forces were at work in that age to bring about something better. The causes for the sterility lay to no small extent in the attitude of the very people who bewailed it; and the forces at work to bring something better to birth were despised for their humbleness, or their lack of traditional "dignity." In fact, the nineteenth century, as we can now see, taught very plainly the lesson that drama cannot be superimposed from above, either by actors or critics or "highbrows," and cannot flourish by imitating formulas, no matter how dignified and classic. Drama, to be alive, must flower from the popular theatre, answer the popular demands, keep step with its own day, and be spontaneously entertaining.

As we have seen, the two Theatres Royal in London grew to swollen size, and by the nineteenth century were so vast that delicacy of acting in intimate drama was well-nigh impossible on their stages. Yet only these two houses, and the Haymarket, could legally present "legitimate" drama—*i.e.*

plays entirely conducted by spoken dialogue. Even if writers had existed with the ability and desire to write plays in the style we now enjoy, they could hardly have done so, for there was no proper place in which to act them. Broad farce, spectacle, bombast, "heroic" blank verse, continued. But it was not satisfactory. People wanted something different, something more intimate, something more entertaining. And as a result a number of small theatres sprang up all over London, which evaded the law by presenting "illegitimate" dramas—*i.e.* melodramas, in which music was played during the speeches, or burlettas and burlesques, in which songs and dances were introduced. There soon came a time when these entertainments, being more lively and contemporaneous, were more popular than the plays at the patent houses. A brilliant and able woman, Madame Vestris (daughter of Bartolozzi, the engraver), who sang, danced and acted with equal charm, allied herself with J. R. Planché for an author, and later with Charles Mathews, a brilliant light comedian, as leading man (and husband) and speedily started a revolution in London theatricals. She fitted up the small Olympic Theatre both in front and behind the footlights into a comfortable and intimate place, with real chairs and carpets on the stage, careful attention to costume, excellent music, tasteful decorations, and programs which began not so early and ended at eleven. Hitherto, Shakespeare, even, had been followed by a farce, and the entertainments at Drury Lane and Covent Garden ran from seven-thirty to midnight or later, in barnlike theatres with flapping canvases for scenery. Vestris gave her house style and comfort. But she did more. In Charles Mathews (who joined her three years after her start) she acquired an actor who anticipated modern methods. It is evident, from contemporary descriptions, that his method was

not unlike that of such a player as John Drew—easy, casual, natural, seemingly artless, without any of the pose and exaggeration of his generation. And in Planché she had a witty writer who could fit Mathews and herself and the rest of the carefully drilled company with skits and satires and burlettas which poked fun at contemporary events, and gave these players the opportunity to display their natural methods fittingly. If we could see to-day one of these pieces, like "The Olympic Revels" with which Vestris opened the Olympic in 1831, we should recognize it as more nearly akin to our current "reviews" or "Follies of 1930" than to a regular play. Certainly the highbrows of 1831, bewailing the slim attendance upon Shakespeare at Drury Lane, saw in it, and in the public acceptance of it, only the degradation of the drama. What was the stage coming to, when a burlesque could draw crowds, while Shakespeare or Sheridan played to empty benches?

What, indeed? The stage was coming to a realization that a new form of drama was needed; its tastes were changing, new audiences demanded new styles, a new age was looking for its own method of expression. It didn't find it at once, of course. But Vestris and Mathews were a portent. The Olympic Theatre, with its careful stage management, its natural acting, its realistic settings, its freedom from cant and tradition, its honest care for intelligent burlesque, was a revolution, and as Professor Watson points out in his fascinating book, "From Sheridan to Robertson," it "was more far-reaching than anything attempted by Kemble, Kean, or Macready." Vestris and Mathews were forced to produce burlesque instead of straight drama, to be sure, but at any rate, by so doing, and by doing it well and intelligently, they demonstrated the superiority of the fresh and contemporary over

the traditional. They broke with tradition—always the first step in progress toward new forms of art.

After a tour in America, where their demands for real carpets on the stage caused consternation, they returned to England and boldly took over Covent Garden, which Macready, the Shakespearian actor, had just given up. They managed this patent house from 1839 to 1842, and made a brave attempt, on its huge stage, so long dedicated to all the traditional drama, to produce a newer and more intimate type of play. They found one play, in 1841, written by a youth who said he was not yet twenty-one, Dion Boucicault, which as they staged and acted it seemed to their contemporaries astonishingly fresh. That play was "London Assurance," which we have now to read. It will not seem fresh to us. It will seem, indeed, but another repetition of the outworn formula of Jonsonian-Restoration comedy. Its plot will seem absurd, its bravura passages flamboyant rhetoric, its characters puppets. But we must bear in mind that, after all, the scene is supposed to be in 1841—the year of production. Vestris and Mathews and their company not only played the comedy in a modern box set with a ceiling, instead of in the traditional wing pieces (the box set, however, had been known and sometimes used in the eighteenth century), but they dressed it in contemporary clothes, they acted it as closely as they could in the contemporary speech and manners, they swung it through (for it does have dash and "go") with an easy nonchalant air which quite captivated audiences only too well trained in overlooking childishness of plot and absurdity of character.

So far, then, as young Boucicault's play was revolutionary, or forward looking, that was due rather to the producers and actors than to the author. Once again we see that a history

of the drama cannot be divorced from a history of the *theatre*. It may be what is done to a play in production which determines its influence. It may be the actors, the stage directors, who push the drama forward toward new vitality. In this case, it certainly was.

The reader will doubtless note at once in "London Assurance" the clumsy exposition, first made by the conversation of two servants, and a little later by *Sir Harcourt,* who tells *Cool* at great length what *Cool* knew all the time—but the audience did not. That type of exposition was a tradition of the stage; it was, of course, unnatural, a mere convention. But it is significant that at about this time, and during the next two or three decades, the young humorists of England, in their comic sketches for "Punch" and other papers, began to poke fun at just this sort of thing. England was laughing at its own drama, which not so long ago it had taken quite seriously. That meant, of course, that the time was ripening for a change, for a method of play writing which would stand the test of probability, and to effect that change no doubt the old had to be ridiculed, there had to be satire, before the ground was ready for the new.

Suppose the student reads "London Assurance" chiefly to pick the absurdities in its story, characterizations and style. Suppose you imagine yourself a critic back in the 1840's, but a critic gifted with insight beyond your day. On what would you pounce to ridicule? Go through the comedy with that in mind, considering it as a play pretending to represent contemporary society. Is *Sir Harcourt* anything more than a Jonsonian "humour"—senile vanity? Is *Dazzle* a person, or is his a traditional stunt part for Mathews to act? Is it credible that young *Courtly* could have so completely hoodwinked his father as to his character, and still more that

he could make his father believe, face to face, that he was somebody else? Does such an impossible mistaken identity destroy the illusion of actuality? Are such speeches as those made by *Grace* in Act III, about "the tear that glistens in the opening eye of morning," characteristic of the way people talked in 1841, or merely of a stage tradition descended from the eighteenth century sentimental drama? In the scene between *Charles* and *Grace* toward the end of Act III, are the asides of each character in the least necessary? Couldn't the actors express by natural means everything they now say to the audience? Is *Meddle,* the lawyer, anything more than a very exaggerated and stupid "humour"? Has he any relation to the plot? Who, or what—if anybody or anything —in the play gets to your emotions of sympathetic interest, comes alive for you, creates an illusion of reality?

If the student answers such questions as these, criticising the play from his standpoint of modernity, he will feel, I fancy, how much closer it is to the drama which preceded it than to anything characteristic of to-day. I have myself seen the old piece revived, and recall distinctly how the *Lady Gay Spanker,* clad in a green riding habit out of Godey's Lady's Book, came down to the footlights and delivered her speech about hunting directly at the audience, cracking her boot with her riding crop for emphasis. It was just the sort of thing we used to see in Italian opera, when the soprano came forward, signalled to the flutist and went into a spasm of trills. And yet *Lady Gay* has something of life about her, beside this artificial, pumped-up vivacity. She is a person, and justifies the suspense the author creates for her before her entrance. Her laughing acknowledgment of affection for her absurd husband rings true. If the author had not been a boy, a poor boy seeking desperately for success, if he had not

seen all about him indications in the dramas of Sheridan Knowles, Bulwer Lytton, and others, that rhetorical outbursts were popular, if he had not been confined for models of play writing to the current repertoire of the English stage —*i.e.* to old-time comedies and farces and imitations of them —he might have made a real play, from our modern point of view, out of *Lady Gay Spanker,* her joust with the silly old man, and the near catastrophe to her own husband. When she discovers that a vain old coxcomb and dandy may also be no coward, there is meat for a real situation. But young Boucicault slid over it, using it only to further his farce. Nor could he be blamed. There was nobody in England then to teach him better. Thackeray could—and did—poke fun at him. Thackeray could write novels. But Thackeray could not write plays. What "London Assurance" shows us is that England in 1841 welcomed such freshness as Vestris and Mathews could impart to this play; that a contemporary drama capable of handling contemporary life truthfully and entertainingly was needed; but that nobody as yet existed who had found the way to write it.

Vestris and Mathews were forced out of Covent Garden by the too greedy owners after three years of management. But almost immediately the ancient theatrical monopoly was dissolved by popular demand, and after 1843 any theatre could produce legitimate drama. Madame Vestris, however, was now aging, and in debt. She and Mathews went back to their productions of burlettas, though also from time to time bowing to convention by revivals of Shakespeare. They were not destined to lead the drama any farther out of the bog of tradition. It was not till another twenty years that a dramatist and an acting company at last were developed who could set foot definitely on the hard shore of modernity.

27

IN AMERICA, TO THE CIVIL WAR

We must now retrace our steps briefly, for after the American Revolutionary War drama in English ceased to be synonymous with English drama; it included American drama. The early years of the stage in America are not important, to be sure, in a literary history. Our early attempts at play writing were scattering and feeble. But certain features of those early years illustrate vividly how here, as in England, the new drama emerged not from tradition, not from attempts to ape Shakespeare or to act Sheridan, but from the heart of the popular playhouse. This is the more significant, too, because in America there were no monopoly theatres; any house was free to act anything it wished, so if burlesque flourished (as it did), and similar "vulgar" entertainments, that was entirely because people wanted them.

Besides, it is our history—a poor thing, but our own.

The first author of an American play on a native theme, professionally produced, was Royal Tyler. He was also the first "Harvard playwright." A New Englander, a graduate of Harvard, and because he came from New England, where no theatres had been permitted, quite unfamiliar with the stage, he arrived in New York in 1787, on business connected with Shays' Rebellion, and of course at once went to the playhouse, a little barn of a place down on John Street. He evidently saw, among other plays, "The School for Scandal." Without more ado, he sat down and wrote a play himself in three weeks, called it "The Contrast," took it to the

theatre, and presently had the satisfaction of witnessing it on the boards. Under such circumstances, it would have been the miracle of all history had the play been a masterpiece. It wasn't. It was an imitation of the plays he had seen. It was full of the sentimental comedy influence as well as attempted satire, full of inflated sentiments put into the mouth of his American hero, full of clumsiness, too. But Royal Tyler was no fool, and perhaps the very fact that he wasn't theatre-wise clarified his vision in some respects. At any rate, he introduced one character who was not an imitation of anything in English comedy. *Jonathan,* the Yankee servant (or "waiter," as he insists on being called) was not taken from Sheridan or Goldsmith. He was taken from Vermont. Evidently he spoke with a nasal twang (when, exactly, did the New England colonists cease speaking like Englishmen—and why?); and the point of view he brought to the even then sophisticated life of New York was not only amusing to New York audiences, but an authentic piece of American reporting. Every student should read "The Contrast," alike for its naïve imitation of the plays Tyler had just seen, for its bits of dialogue which tell so freshly what New York was like in 1787, and above all for this Yankee character of *Jonathan,* who was the first of a long, long line of "stage Yankees," stretching down to our own day (witness Tarkington's "The Man from Home"), the first character put freshly upon our stage with the avowed intention of making entertainment out of native material. Note, too, that this *Jonathan* is not an aristocrat. He is the common person. He is revolt against the aristocratic tradition. He is the theatre of the people. He is out to make the stage safe for democracy!

Most early American plays are hard to get at, and little repay reading unless you wish to go rather deeply into the

subject. But you can easily come by George Washington Park Custis' drama "Pocahontas" (produced in 1830), which is printed in Professor Quinn's "Specimens of American Drama." Custis, of course, was George Washington's step-grandson, and was reared at Mount Vernon. But to the perhaps naturally pompous language of a Virginia gentleman of his day, he added in this drama the very worst rhetorical features of the sentimental comedy and of such a bombastic balloon as "Pizarro." Captain John Smith and Powhatan, Rolfe and Pocahontas, whites and reds, all talk alike—and as nobody, surely, ever did talk in real life. The theme, to be sure, is American, and one which was long popular with our authors. Baker's opera, "The Indian Maid," was produced in 1808. In 1837, Owen wrote another Pocahontas play. These early and unskilled writers considered the Smith-Pocahontas episode dramatic. Actually, of course, it is not. It is well enough in an historical pageant, but for purposes of sustained drama it is insufficient, especially as there were no antecedent or subsequent relations which bound the two characters emotionally together. But certainly no convincing drama could be made by the methods Custis employed. When at length Pocahontas cries out to her father, ". . . for know that I have abjured thy senseless gods and now worship the Supreme Being, the true Manitou, and the father of the universe; 'tis his Almighty hand that sustains me, 'tis his divine spirit that breathes in my soul and prompts Pocahontas to a deed which future ages will admire—" then we ourselves are almost forced to admire such colossal ineptitude. Even if we could grant that a primitive Indian maid would spout such polysyllabic prose, we can hardly grant that her attention to the verdict of posterity before casting herself on Smith's body is consistent with the supposed generosity of

her impulse, or with her simple, savage nature. No, Mr. Custis was inflated with his own bombast, and went soaring away into the ridiculous, quite forgetful of truth to character or situation. How, with any such tradition as this hanging over them, could American writers produce veracious plays of native life? How was the tradition to be got rid of? How was a different, and better, idea of play writing to emerge?

In the next twenty years it began to emerge, helped chiefly by two forces. One was the force of ridicule, applied through burlesque, almost exactly as in England; and the other was the force of better examples, shown spasmodically, here and there, seldom or never through an entire play, examples of native characters truthfully observed, speaking the natural language proper to them, or examples of what the audience recognized as a genuine American attitude toward life. And both these forces were chiefly exerted in the popular theatre, apart from the repertoire of the critically admired actors of the classic tradition.

For example, the Indian plays, such as Pocahontas, were laughed off the boards in a burlesque by John Brougham, in the 1850's. Brougham's "Pocahontas" was a medley of songs, wild puns, ridiculous situations, absurdly exaggerated costumes, burlesque poetry, and after seeing it few people could have gone back to Custis' work with a straight face. During the '50's and '60's, and even later, indeed, burlesque flourished on our stage. Many of our best actors appeared in it—men like Joseph Jefferson, William Florence, and later William H. Crane, Henry E. Dixey, Nat Goodwin, and so on. It even turned Shakespeare upside down. It ridiculed melodrama and bombast. It encouraged intimate acting, because, to deliver their topical "gags" the actors had to assume a conversational tone with the audience. It punctured the pontifical

[illegible] of the romantic tradition and constantly introduced a contemporary note. Similarly, the negro minstrel, an indigenous form of American entertainment, originated in the early 1840's and flourishing for two generations, were full of local and topical jokes, accustomed audiences to regard native negro character and music as a source of entertainment and encouraged ease and intimacy between stage and audience. As we owe most of our folk songs to the negro minstrels, and indeed all our most characteristic modern popular music, so we owe, more largely than is recognized, something of our modern attitude toward drama to the same humble source.

In the "legitimate" theatre itself, there were also portents. Perhaps "Fashion" may be so regarded. This play by a young and fashionable New York woman, Anna Cora Mowatt, was produced in New York in 1845, and was a great success. Later it repeated its success in London. It was revived in New York in 1924 as a sort of skylark or burlesque but even under these conditions it managed to stand up. Edgar Allan Poe, writing of it, said it resembled "The School for Scandal" "as the shell resembles the living beast," a harsh verdict, but not undeserved if we consider the play as Poe did, merely an attempt to write a Comedy of Manners in the style of Congreve and Sheridan. But let us read the play from a somewhat different point of view. Let us look in it for honest use of American material, for anything we can find which differentiates it from an imitation of the traditional Comedy of Manners, or social satire, and gives it an independent value. The outrageous social climber, Mrs. Tiffany, is certainly a traditional caricature, to a large extent. So is the simpering daughter, and the idiotic spinster aunt. The poet is a pale echo of Sir Benjamin Backbite. The whole

intrigue of the plot has the traditional childishness about it. Even the bogus *Count* is scarcely original, nor is the injection of *Trueman,* the upstate (and upstanding) farmer, who brings the breath of the wholesome country to this city establishment. All traditional, you say, even though handled in a sprightly if exaggerated manner, and dressed with American trimmings. But what is not traditional in "Fashion" is the fact that *Trueman's* attitude is distinctly different from that of similar characters in the old comedies. It is different, just as *Jonathan* in "The Contrast" differs from traditional servants. *Trueman* is a mouthpiece for what was, undoubtedly, the characteristic American attitude at the time toward fashionable apings of European modes, toward extravagance, toward titles and title worship. Somehow the play gets through to us a genuine and honestly felt point of view, does it not?—and a point of view still shared, probably, by the great majority of Americans. Many years later Mr. Dooley held forth inimitably about the foreign dukes who led $4,000,000 worth of blushing American securities to the altar. "Fashion" was a forerunner of just such satire as this. It employed a traditional mold, but into the mixture it injected a genuinely native point of view, which probably accounted for its success.

Only three years later, an actor named Frank S. Chanfrau came forth for a benefit in a play called "A Glance at New York," written by Benjamin Baker, prompter at the Olympic Theatre. The text is not available, unless you go to the Harvard College library, and it is certainly no masterpiece. Like similar plays which had preceded it, "A Glance at New York" was a mélange of "low life" characters, melodramatic incidents, even songs, shaped to a model copied from English melodramas of the period. What made the piece a sensational

popular success was Chanfrau's impersonation of *Mose, the Fireman,* one of those rowdy, swaggering, fighting, irrepressible "Bowery B'hoys" who manned the fire engines which used to tear through the streets of wooden New York. These volunteer firemen fought fires, each other, and the police. They occupied a large place in the consciousness of New York (as of all other American cities). Chanfrau not only assumed the dress, but caught the very accents of the type. He created a lively, picturesque and entertaining stage figure right out of contemporary life. And that such a proceeding meant more to the public than the imitations of traditional masterpieces, however correct, was witnessed by the way they flocked to see him.

Before we return to England, there is one more American play which should be read, in order to sense the slow and groping growth of modern drama out of the broken-down wreck of traditionalism. That play is Dion Boucicault's "The Octoroon," produced in New York in 1859 with such excellent actors as Joseph Jefferson, George Holland and J. H. Stoddart in the cast, and Boucicault's beautiful young wife, Agnes Robertson, in the title rôle. Boucicault, as we have seen, wrote "London Assurance" when he was nineteen (or twenty-one, as you choose), a play in the strict Comedy of Manners tradition. He tried, in vain, to repeat this success, and then, to make a living, fell back, as so many stage writers had to do at that time, on hack adaptations from the French, for which the managers, thanks to lack of international copyright, had to pay no royalties. It is impossible in this book to deal with the French drama of the mid-nineteenth century, or to trace its influence on the English stage. We can only point out that following the romantic revolt from classicism in France, led by Victor Hugo, there came an era of plays

which were full of well-ordered action and excitement, and a constant development in the technique of portraying contemporary life. From adapting these plays, Boucicault and other English dramatists undoubtedly learned much about their profession. After some years of this hack work, Boucicault came to America, with Agnes Robertson. Being Irish by birth and mercurial by temperament, Boucicault caught the spirit and aspect of the new land in a remarkably short time. He began writing American plays, and for the rest of his life had a much greater influence on our stage than on the stage of England.

In December, 1859, only a week after the execution of John Brown, with the Civil War already rumbling and the very word "slave" a powder magazine, he produced "The Octoroon," with the scene laid on a Louisiana plantation and the subject matter highly inflammable. But he had no intention of precipitating a riot, and one of the cleverest features of the play is the way in which he avoids letting it take sides, and manages to excite sympathy against slavery without sacrificing sympathy for the South. The play was not, like "Uncle Tom's Cabin," a tract. It was an entertainment, and a popular one. And it deserves rather close study because it shows so well how drama was developing, how it had developed, indeed, in the eighteen years of this writer's work.

Take, for example, the opening scene of "The Octoroon," and compare it with the opening of "London Assurance." We have a novel setting, striking a mood at once by its long veranda, its outdoor table, its distant plantation. We have atmosphere, or "local color." The play begins by combining happily necessary exposition with a delightful and fresh little picture of the privileged old servant, *Pete,* and the negro children, who weren't born, but swarmed on a sassafras tree. The scene is a bit of real life, and warms us emotionally.

Pete is no traditional servant out of the old comedy and Ben Jonson. He is out of the old South. He is, too, a character in his own right, and later in the play he assumes a wistfully comic dignity when he tells the other darkies they must look their best at the sale, to fetch a good price for the Mistress, and when he waxes indignant at the paltry $100 offered for himself. The actor playing this part for the first time could not merely fall into a stock line of gestures and inflections. He had to work out a genuine impersonation, and by it he was able to touch the hearts of his audience.

Although Boucicault took the bare outlines of his story from Reid's novel, "The Quadroon," and the incident of the detection of the murder by a camera plate, from another novel, that does not detract from his use of them on the stage. By making the quadroon an octoroon, he of course heightened the pathos of her situation, a situation around which the play is built, and which was—and is—peculiarly and poignantly an American theme. It is so peculiarly American that when the play was taken to London, *Zoe* was permitted to live; there seemed to the English no tragic bar to her future happiness. In 1859, when slavery and the problems of the South were uppermost in everybody's consciousness, Boucicault's adroitness in employing an octoroon for a heroine and slavery for a background, thus winning pity and sympathy for the blacks, and yet in also showing the southern whites of this particular plantation and neighborhood as kindly and warm-hearted and chivalrous, thus winning sympathy for them, was something of a triumph in diplomacy as well as in dramatic craftsmanship.

He kept his sympathy for the southern whites partially, of course, by making his villain a northerner. But even here he struck a balance by depicting a second northerner who was as likeable as the first was despicable. *M'Closky* seems to-day,

no doubt, an impossible villain, out of a forgotten style of melodrama—or the cheap movies. The burning of the steamer and *M'Closky's* escape and capture by the avenging Indian, are also relics of the sensational and spectacular elements of the popular theatre. The camera trick, by which the murder is proved, is just that—a trick, like Gillette's lighted cigar in "Sherlock Holmes" forty years later. The business of the stolen letters and the mortgaged plantation are easy and traditional devices to bring the situations about. Granted all that. But through the play, with its melodrama, its trickery, its shopworn plot devices, runs the thread of fresh, true observation of negro life, creating little pictures full of color and warmth, runs the thread of genuine sympathy for *Zoe,* caught in the tragic web of her racial fate, runs the understanding of the Southerners as people with their peculiar problems, peculiar code, their differences from anything European, or even northern. In "The Octoroon," then, we see emerging, before the Civil War, traces of the modern drama, the drama of fresh observation, accurate reporting, and emotion based on the problems and conflicts of actual life, not on the traditional situations of the playhouse.

As a final word, it might be added that Boucicault himself testified that when he came to America in the 1850's, he found far better and less tradition-bound actors than he left in England, he found more intelligent stage management in the theatres, and he found a public more alert for innovation and development. We have probably underestimated the American stage in the mid-nineteenth century. Actually, in comparison to that of England, it was the more alive, because less hampered by tradition. Boucicault, by coming here, actually anticipated the development of modern drama in England.

28

THE ROBERTSON COMEDY

We will now return to England, leaving America to the Civil War, a drama somewhat dwarfing any its theatres could develop. In the 1850's in England there was a young actor, would-be dramatist, and hack writer, named Tom Robertson, who had a pretty definite idea of the kind of plays he wished to write, and also of the way he wanted them acted, but who nearly starved to death before he got a hearing. No one has yet written an economic interpretation of theatrical history; perhaps one is needed. At any rate, play writing was a profession in Shakespeare's day, and men made a living at it, if not always a very good one. During the Restoration, plays were chiefly written by "gentlemen" who affected the amateur attitude, and to most of them money was not the essential thing. During our own day, under the protection of international copyright, play writing is a dignified and potentially highly lucrative profession. Any one who practices it successfully need do nothing else. Men like Barrie and Shaw are millionaires. But over wide stretches of time, and those the barren times, in the theatre, play writing was precarious, and few indeed could live by it, could make it a serious and dignified life work. That was the case in both England and America in the early and mid-nineteenth century. It may to no small extent account for the fact that the new drama was so slow in coming, and that there were so few first-rate minds concerned with dramatic authorship.

At any rate, it accounted for poor Tom Robertson's privations. He did not get his chance until two actors and a proper theatre were ready for him. Those actors were Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft (Marie Wilton and the future Sir Squire Bancroft), and the theatre was the little Prince of Wales. Marie Wilton, like Madame Vestris before her, had been trained in burlesque. Bancroft belonged distinctly to the school of Mathews. They fitted up their theatre tastefully, like a drawing-room. They, too, kept their program down to a single play. They assembled a cast of young players, none of them trained in the older tradition. And in 1865 they set out to continue the work Vestris and Mathews had begun. In Tom Robertson they found the dramatist to help them. Robertson knew exactly what he wanted to do, and they were in sympathy with it. He gave them, first, in 1865, a play called "Society," in which he had not yet quite found himself. In 1867, however, he gave them "Caste," and with the production of that comedy the modern English drama stepped at last on to the firm road of progress. The production was a huge success, and the play continued to be acted from time to time well into the twentieth century. Its influence, not so much by itself as in conjunction with the way it was staged and acted at the Prince of Wales, can hardly be overstressed. From it, and from further plays by Robertson and his school, largely came the rebirth of the English theatre, and the new desire to grapple with contemporary life, to analyze character, to deal with facts, not stage traditions.

"Caste" should now be read, bearing in mind especially all points in which it seems an advance over a play like "London Assurance." The student will note, of course, that it is in three acts instead of the traditional five, and each act is in a single scene. It thus concentrates the action into a limited

space and a limited time, making possible a more sustained development and less diffusion of interest. The sets are only two in number, very simple rooms, and realistically built and furnished by the Bancrofts. Here was the modern picture frame stage, with the fourth wall removed from a real room and the audience looking into it. The company were carefully drilled, by Robertson himself, who may be called one of the first of the modern stage directors, into naturalness of speech and action, elimination of overemphasis, apparent lack of any consciousness that an audience was peeping at them. They were to give the illusion not of acting but of reality itself.

The student will further note that the play has a definite intellectual base, or purpose—to show the injustices and emotional disasters lurking in the British social caste system, a purpose it never for a moment loses sight of, though, of course, it is not a profound purpose, nor a complex. Both his concentration into three acts, with the consequent more sustained development, and his interest in a social problem, Robertson no doubt learned from the French—from Dumas *fils* and Augier perhaps. But his application was thoroughly English—his characters, problems and atmosphere were native. There are no borrowed situations. Everything which happens in the play develops naturally and logically from what preceded it. Furthermore, even the comedy of *Sam* and *Polly* and *Eccles* is employed to heighten by contrast our emotional interest in the central situation; the play keeps hold steadily of our sympathies, asking us not so much to laugh or thrill at stunts performed by the actors, as to give emotional response to certain real people involved in a difficult and at times pathetic predicament.

The crafty reader will of course detect that Robertson was

too shrewd a dramatist not to know what his actors could do, and to fit parts for them. *Polly's* ebullient nature gave copious opportunity to the bubbling and popular Mrs. Wilton. *Captain Hawtree,* the swell friend, good at heart but worldliwise and supercilious, fitted Squire Bancroft. That superb character actor, John Hare, then a young man, could—and did—make a wonderful portrait in the Dickens manner out of old *Eccles*—comical yet not a little terrible, too, in its sodden suggestion. There was no ignoring of the theatre as theatre here; this was not the attempted complete naturalism of later years. But there was the constant effort, and for that day successful effort, to fuse acting parts with reality, to weld "show passages" for the players into the thread of the story, to combine the pleasure an old-time audience took in sheer acting (something we now know little about) with their emotion for the characters and situation. When *Lady Gay Spanker* comes forward and describes the hunt, we have no emotion at all, except one of admiration (perhaps) for the elocution and pumped-up "dash" of the actress. But when old *Eccles* talks about the down-trodden working man, and robs his grandchild of the coral necklace to buy himself a drink, we may forget entirely the actor's skill as an impersonator, lost in our emotions at what the scene portends. Chiefly, perhaps, we sense with pity what the mother will feel when she discovers the theft, and we wonder what she will do. And as proof of his skill as a dramatist, Robertson brings on the mother, in answer to our curiosity. One more link has been added in the chain which leads to our final tearful delight at the reunion of the parents and the departure of *Eccles* to drink himself to death.

Tearful delight, that is, if we were Londoners—or New Yorkers—of 1867. Of course, the *Marquise* seems now little

better than a caricature, and the whole pathos of the situation is weakened by the enormous changes in modern society. The play is faded, old-fashioned, and thin. But we must try to see it with contemporary eyes, and especially to note that most of the characters are not stock figures out of traditional comedy, but individual creations, however simple in outline. There is no father like *Eccles* in the old comedies. The two girls, supporting themselves and this horrible old creature by stage work, are out of some real theatre Robertson knew, not out of its lumber of plays. Finally, he asked interest in these characters because they were people, involved in a contemporarily possible situation of grave moment to themselves and some moment to other Englishmen, not because they were amusing puppets pulled by a string. Shakespeare, in his own day and his own romantic way, had created real characters, rousing emotion by virtue of our imaginative sympathy in their joys and troubles. But thereafter the blight of Ben Jonson had fallen on the stage, and with brilliant exceptions when something else could take the place of individualizing characterization, English drama had played variation after variation on stock themes and characters, till at last there was no life nor health in it. In some fashion applicable to the modern world—as poetic and romantic drama were not—it had to find a new technique. And in the plays of Tom Robertson, it was on the road at last.

After a few more comedies, poor Robertson died in 1871. He had scarce turned forty, but was worn out by his early struggles and privations. During his last years, however, thanks to the Bancrofts, and in spite of the fact that America paid him no royalties on all the pirated performances of his plays, he enjoyed what was then a large income, and as he was, with Boucicault, among the first modern dramatists to

demonstrate in the theatre the value to their work of painstaking stage management, so he was one of the first to benefit by financial independence. Play writing was at last by way of becoming a real profession, in which an intelligent man could express his personal ideas and vision, and live decently while doing so. A new and brilliant era had begun in the English theatre.

Coincidently, it was not long after that Bronson Howard, in America, began to support himself exclusively by play writing, that Gillette and James A. Herne began to write as well as act, and that farces and comedies on native, contemporary themes grew in number and importance. With us, too, the modern era was setting in.

29

W. S. GILBERT

England did not immediately grasp the full significance of what Tom Robertson had done, and the more critical called his plays "cup and saucer comedies." The humbleness and mental simplicity of his people, the gentle sentimentality, the lack of theatrical excitement in his plots, made the plays seem trivial to people of intellectual force—as indeed they were, in all but the significance of their method. Also, of course, the stage was still largely given over to actors differently trained, and nowhere is tradition so hard to overthrow as in the theatre. Finally, the English stage needed the additional knowledge and impulse that were soon to come to it from the Continent, especially from the work of Henrik Ibsen, the giant of the modern drama and the greatest single force in the theatre since Molière.

In some English playhouses the old "classic" repertoire continued to flourish, and was soon to take on new life from the genius of Henry Irving. In others "classic" comedy yielded to farce and the ever-present burlesque, while still others presented melodrama. Melodrama, highly colored, written usually in many scenes, a front-of-the-curtain scene alternating with a full-stage set after the fashion of Restoration days, and peopled with deep, dark villains and lily-white heroes and heroines, was a staple fare in England during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and even later. It was equally popular in America. But in both countries

now it has either taken on the superficial veneer of realism, or else yielded place to the motion pictures.

One of Tom Robertson's friends in the 1860's was a young barrister without any briefs. His name was William Schwenk Gilbert. He amused himself, and earned money, by writing and illustrating comic poems for a paper called "Fun," edited by another friend, Tom Hood; and also by taking part in amateur plays, and haunting the theatre. His comic poems he called "Bab Ballads." To-day they are classics. They resulted in his being asked to write songs and burlesques for the theatres, and presently he was writing plays, and doing well at it. In none of them, to be sure, did he find his true "line." They weren't much like the old comedies, but neither were they definitely new. Read, for example, "Pygmalion and Galatea" (1871), a famous play in its day, especially when acted by the beautiful American, Mary Anderson. This three-act romantic comedy is in rather stiff blank verse. You feel, do you not, that Gilbert isn't happy writing dialogue in blank verse? He is not really romantic himself, nor in the least emotionally aroused, so his verse doesn't rise to poetry; and, on the other hand, it clogs his freedom of expression for comedy. The idea of the statue come to life, innocent of all worldly conventions, and by very innocence making trouble for everybody, is a good one. But at best Gilbert gets a few bitter jibes at society out of it, and a little mild fun. Romantic conventions of the poetic drama pull him back toward an emotional world where he cannot breathe, and his natural love of satire, his more modern attitude, cannot get him forward.

Read, now or later, with this play of Gilbert's in mind, G. B. Shaw's comedy on the same theme, "Pygmalion," and see the vast development the intervening years have brought.

In one or two of his prose dramas, notably a topsy-turvy farce, called "Engaged," Gilbert felt more definitely toward original expression. But it was not really till he joined forces with the composer, Arthur Sullivan, and turned out a series of comic opera librettos, that he made a definite contribution to the English theatre—indeed, to the theatre of the world. The first of these light operas, or operettas, to attract wide attention was "H.M.S. Pinafore," produced in London in 1878, and shortly after in a score or more of pirated versions in the United States. It soon swept around the English-speaking world, and as year after year, for more than a decade, other masterpieces by this inspired pair were produced, they went even into the repertoire of European opera houses. There has probably not been a year since "Pinafore" appeared when some of them have not been sung, somewhere, and during the seasons of 1926-7-8 three of them, produced by Winthrop Ames, were sung triumphantly in the United States, a half-century after their original production.

It is very difficult, of course, to dissociate Gilbert's work from the music. Indeed, the perfect welding of sense and sound is a part of the enduring merit of these operettas. But for our purposes here, the music must be ignored, so far as that is humanly possible. What Gilbert did, first, was to take the burlesque, in which his early training had been received, and make a finished work of art of it, giving it a keener satirical point, grace and charm and delicacy of workmanship, and dramatic cohesion. Let us now read the text of "Pinafore," heroically refraining from bursting into song. The story is absurd; nothing could be more so. But how consistent in its absurdity, how sure in its development, how dramatic in its climaxes! How neatly every song and every chorus fits into the plot and moves the story along! How

delicious the constant shock of topsy-turvy! Gilbert, like Robertson, was his own stage manager, and something of a martinet. The deck of the "Pinafore" had to be just right, the uniforms had to be correct, the actors had to play their parts with the utmost earnestness and gravity. And they have to still, in every good revival. Just as Sullivan's music is reminiscent of the lovely old English tunes of the eighteenth century, so Gilbert's solemn topsy-turvy and the consequent cut of his satire, is reminiscent of "The Beggars' Opera." Certainly there had been no such operetta success on the English stage as "Pinafore" since "The Beggars' Opera," a century and a half before. Here was comedy that wasn't horseplay, satire that had a mind behind it, style, beauty, distinction. No wonder people rubbed their eyes, and opened their ears, and felt that a vanished glory had come back to the English stage! "Pinafore" and its immortal successors, such as "Iolanthe" and "The Mikado" (one of the world's few perfect works of art) not only raised the standard of musical comedy and created a new and better type of lyric entertainment—raised it so high, indeed, that we can't live up to it; but they helped greatly to bring back into the theatre many intelligent people who had deserted it, they gave it new prestige, they forced on dramas without music the need of better staging, livelier and more contemporaneous wit, more grace and style. No doubt, too, these operettas, especially such a satire as "Patience," helped in the deflation of the romantic tradition, in a return to the dry common sense so necessary to an appreciation of realistic drama and especially satiric comedy. It has been truly said that G. B. Shaw, to-day, is in no small degree possible because of W. S. Gilbert in the 1880's.

30

HENRY ARTHUR JONES AND ARTHUR WING PINERO

There were two men, Henry Arthur Jones and Arthur Wing Pinero, who, above others, figured directly in the renascence of English drama in the last years of the nineteenth century, who carried on from Tom Robertson, blew the torch to a much brighter flame, and passed it to a score of waiting hands. Both, before they did their best work, were affected by Ibsen, and by the dramatists of France, though in Jones' case the influence was indirect. One of them, Jones, turned critic as well as playwright, wrote pamphlets and even books to defend, against Victorian prejudice, the right of the dramatist to pick his subjects where he chose, or, as he put it, to treat of "the great realities of modern life." Both were attacked for their first attempts to broaden and deepen the subject matter of English drama, and to treat contemporary life without gloves. Both gave themselves entirely to the theatre as a profession, and fought successfully to establish play writing once more as one of the major branches of the fine arts. Whatever fate overtakes their plays in the future, the place of these two men in the development of the English drama is secure.

Henry Arthur Jones was born on a farm of "middle-class" stock—or as we would say of democratic origin, had scant formal education, and started life as a travelling salesman. His first attempts at drama were one-act plays. His first success, and financially one of his greatest, giving him

independence to experiment, was a howling melodrama, "The Silver King," written in collaboration with Henry Herman and produced by Wilson Barrett in 1882. Here was no attempt to develop the Robertsonian method. This was melodrama blatant and unashamed, and the reader of to-day can get from it a pretty good idea of both the best and the worst features of that once popular form of entertainment. "The Silver King" is in no less than fifteen scenes, alternately before the curtain and on full stage—the traditional technique, permitting the story to cover a lot of ground and a lot of time, but not permitting sustained development of a given situation. The villains are all black as Stygian night, and the heroine, poor, put-upon *Nelly* (of course her name would be Nelly!) is a model of meek fidelity to her drunken husband, quite incredible in this later age. Detectives are always popping in and out; things happen most opportunely for purposes of the plot; in fact, the plot's the thing. It is, however, an ingenious plot. A man, drunk, thinks he has killed another man, and flees, pursued by the police. The train he was on is wrecked, and it is supposed he was killed. So he finds himself free, but haunted by a deep sense of guilt, so that he refuses to make himself known to his suffering family. He achieves a fortune under an assumed name, learns finally that he wasn't a murderer, after all, and rejoins his family, made over into a better man by the years of remorse. In detail, the working out of this plot was full of excitement for the less exacting audiences of the 1880's—how well I recall my boyhood thrills at this play! To-day it often seems childish and absurd because it takes so little trouble with the minor probabilities. However, the idea of a man haunted by a sin he really didn't commit, and reformed by a sense of guilt from drunkenness and gambling, is a good one, and we can-

not avoid watching to see how the poor fellow is going to come through and learn finally his innocence. The character of *Skinner,* the "dress-suit" burglar, is a good one, also—and has been a good one many times since, under various names, such as *Raffles*. The dialogue of the play, though at the climaxes it rises to the rant of melodramatic tag lines, is not without merit. It often characterizes the people—especially *Skinner,* and it is, for this time and type of play, simple and easy and natural. Jones here was learning skill in handling a story on the stage, in creating suspense and climax; but to his melodramatic material he was bringing a new touch of naturalness and purpose, in dialogue and character development. He could not avoid the influences in the air.

Shortly after "The Silver King," Jones made an English adaptation of Ibsen's "The Doll's House," which had been produced in Norway in 1879. He tacked on a happy ending, and apparently hardly grasped the profound significance of this drama. Yet immediately after this adaptation he produced a play of his own called "Saints and Sinners" which, if it did not show any definite Ibsen influences, demonstrated clearly enough that Jones was moving in the same general direction, even though he was so stubborn an Englishman that he had to muddle through in his own way. In "Saints and Sinners" Jones went to a midland town for his scene, and to middle-class nonconformists for many of his characters. His plot was melodramatic, and contained an old-fashioned sentimental seduction. But his middle-class characters were drawn with an eye on the object, he looked at certain of their hypocrisies, and dared to find those hypocrisies in the shadow of the church. The play was hissed at its opening performance, and attacked on many sides by writers who winced at the note of reality it contained. Jones flew to its

defense, in counter articles—and at last the battle was on for the "new freedom of the stage."

After a few more melodramas, Jones, in 1890, produced a play called "Judah" in which at last plot was subordinated to character, in which character, indeed, dictated the plot, and not the other way around. His people were studied as individual human beings, and what they did, so far as he was able to show it, resulted from the kind of people they were, not from the exigencies of a dramatic fable. In 1896 Jones produced what he has always regarded as his masterpiece of serious drama, "Michael and His Lost Angel." This play failed both in London and New York. It must, therefore, be something less than a dramatic masterpiece. But it reads well, and should certainly be read in any study, however brief, of Jones' place in drama. There is no need to discuss it at any length here, because by turning to Vol. I of G. B. Shaw's "Dramatic Opinions and Essays" you will find a contemporary review, by the master mind of the modern English drama; and a contemporary review, even by something less than a master mind, gives as nothing else can the feeling of the period. You will note that Shaw springs at once to a discussion of the *ideas* behind the play, that he treats the two leading characters as human beings, not as stage figures, and points out in what ways they—and more especially the clergyman-hero—are representative of conventional ways of life, are afraid of spiritual honesty. Imagine such a discussion over the people of "London Assurance" or even "Caste." We are here in a different world—a world created by the dramatist in imitation of a real one, and so designed as to shed light upon the deeper recesses of the spirit and the profounder moving forces of society. We have reached modern drama, something infinitely fresher, more intellectually stim-

ulating, and difficult to write, than anything which had preceded it for two centuries at least—perhaps than had ever preceded it.

Jones, a forthright, ardent, and intensely moralistic man, threw himself with great energy and passion into plays like this one, yet it was not in them that he found his true artistic success. It was in comedy, and specifically in the Comedy of Manners. The hold which the Comedy of Manners had on the English theatre was, of course, grounded on something more than mere tradition. Englishmen like it. It was a characteristic form of expression, which, however, had been dulled and blurred by imitative repetition. In the 1890's, with the return of a realistic spirit to literature, and with a new impulse to render contemporary life truthfully, there was a corresponding return to the Comedy of Manners written from a fresh angle. Oscar Wilde, in three plays, especially the whimsical and glittering "The Importance of Being Earnest" (which is free of sentimentality), brought original and pungent wit and epigram back to the theatre in this type of comedy. Wilde did much to restore literary distinction to the theatre, and his place is secure because of that. Jones, trying his hand at it, without Wilde's wit, but with far more dramatic skill, sincerity, and humor, produced "The Case of Rebellious Susan," "The Liars," and many other comedies which took their place at once in the growing repertoire of the new theatre. "The Liars," produced in 1897 by Charles Wyndham in London, and later by John Drew in New York, was an enormous success. It is probably the best play Jones wrote, and should be carefully read for the light it sheds on how deeply the new attitude had affected a very ancient style of play writing, completely revivifying it.

But first, however, bear in mind that the play was written

for Sir Charles Wyndham. That excellent actor was a bit too old to be a stage hero, so he had the part of *Sir Christopher Deering,* the wise, charming, humorous friend who utters what presumably would be Jones' own advice to the perplexed characters. However, a leading man has to make a little, even if elderly, love, so *Mrs. Ebernoe* is introduced, though she has nothing really to do with the story. She is an excrescence who has thus to be explained away. In more plays than you could guess the needs of the company for which the dramatist wrote conditioned his work—probably even conditioned Shakespeare's.

What is the theme of "The Liars"? A silly society woman gets into a flirtation with a serious man who truly loves her. Caught in what to her husband (and to the society of the 1890's) looked like a compromising predicament, she tries to lie her way out, and gets all her friends to help her. One by one, they get tangled up in the web of deceit, and finally they have to be cut out by the lover, who blurts the truth. But he is persuaded to go back to Africa and be a hero, while the silly female goes back to her husband—it being Mr. Jones' belief that there could be no happiness for either of them in an elopement. Playing with fire was a favorite theme of the Restoration Comedy of Manners. Playing with fire is no doubt a favorite occupation of the idle classes anywhere and always. Etherege and his contemporaries looked upon it as quite the thing to do, and any lies and intrigues resulting therefrom were quite all right, especially if they fooled the husband. In this attitude Etherege and his contemporaries were honest. But their imitators were not honest. These imitators went on copying Restoration characters and situations and the Restoration attitude, when all sincerity had gone from them, and they bore no real relation to the people and ideas of their

age. Jones, in "The Liars," peopled his play with men and women from the London of 1896, not 1696. They spoke the language of 1896. Behind them you feel the social forces and ideas of 1896. And, in developing his plot, his intrigue, Jones works with the utmost care to make every situation plausible, every fresh complication a logical and inevitable outgrowth of the one before, every emotional scene the result of the characters being what thy are, not the result of their being placed in a given set of circumstances. Between such an arbitrary plot as that of Congreve's "Love for Love" and the plot of "The Liars" is a wide gulf. When, in *Lady Rosamund's* house in London, the lie is hatched, and then one by one the various characters come through the door and are drawn helplessly into it, there is a fine inevitableness about the whole thing as well as capital humor. Just this situation, you feel, has been coming from the very moment when *Jessica,* poor dear, took the wrong turning. This is a much subtler and more difficult kind of play construction than anything in Congreve, because it is modern, realistic, and permits of no violations of probability. The satire does not obtrude. The fun is constant. The people are real and human and contemporary. But behind them lies a serious point of view, consistent with the temper of the age.

It isn't consistent with the temper of this age, to be sure. The dramatist to-day would probably send *Jessica* off with her African hero, no matter whether it spoiled his life and her husband's, or not. "Self-expression" is the watchword, not self-restraint. But that has nothing to do with the merits of "The Liars" as a reflection of its period, nor with its skill in rejuvenating the English Comedy of Manners by bringing it into line with modern realism of plot and character. It is one of the landmarks of the new drama.

Arthur Wing Pinero, an Englishman of Portuguese Jewish extraction, and in his early life an actor and familiar with the methods and plays of Robertson as they were presented by the Bancrofts, himself began writing plays in the late '70's, and during the '80's produced many farces, and comedies (like "Sweet Lavender") in the sentimental Robertson style. In 1889, like Jones, and perhaps inspired by Jones' challenge in "Saints and Sinners," Pinero produced "The Profligate," a serious drama of contemporary society, and what the French called a problem play. Dissatisfied with it, he retired from writing for two years, devoting his time to a study of both French technique and the dramas of Ibsen. While he was engaged in this study, a translation of Ibsen's "Ghosts" was acted in London, privately, because the censor refused to license it. A year later, in 1893, Pinero came forward again with "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," which exploded like a bomb upon the English stage. Few people who cannot remember the 1890's can form an idea of how this play startled both England and America, how revolutionary it seemed, how deeply moving, how hopeful to the rising generation. I was myself a Freshman in college when I first saw it, with something less than a great actress named Olga Nethersole as *Paula,* but I went night after night. A lot of us quoted it to each other on all occasions. We compared it with the other plays we saw, to their infinite disparagement. It was a bugle call of the new drama in those days.

And, of course, it was an excellent acting play, which was immediately taken into the repertoire even of the Continental actresses.

Rereading it now, those of us who saw it in its first days no doubt wonder just why we were so taken in. We see it

now rather in the light of Shaw's *Saturday Review* articles, for Shaw quite refused to be taken in by what he termed the Pinerotic drama. To him it was spurious, an imitation of modernism, not the real thing. Read, for example, his review of "The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith" ("Dramatic Opinions and Essays"). But few people in those days saw with Shaw's eyes. Many, to be sure, attacked Pinero's dramas because the subjects shocked them; but that wasn't Shaw's objection at all. It was merely that Shaw understood Ibsen far better than Pinero did, and saw much deeper into life as well as into modernism—and had himself to write many plays and prefaces before he could bring the public along with him. Shaw was far ahead of his times in the '90's. Pinero was only just in front. Therefore, for a while, it was Pinero who had the influence, and "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" ploughed the ground for Shaw's later sowing.

This historically important play must now be read.

First, it should be borne in mind that this (like most of Pinero's later plays) is what is technically known as a "well-made play." The well-made play, developed in France, was actually nothing but an attempt to curb the extravagances of romance, to reduce intrigue to apparent probability, and to make a smooth running, plausible story which should have plenty of emotional excitement and suspense about it, but conceal that fact with a gloss of realism. A technique of exposition, entanglement, a penultimate act of spiralling excitement, and then the solution, was worked out by Scribe, Sardou and others (and employed by Ibsen up to the last act of "The Doll's House"), which could produce a play of superficial verisimilitude, yet plentiful theatric excitement of the good old kind, and "fat" acting parts. This technique Pinero mastered completely, and made peculiarly his own. It is to-day

in no great favor. But it unquestionably played an important part in the growth of the modern drama, and a mastery of it, even if he thereafter rejects its full employment, is probably necessary to a modern dramatist for any lasting success, just as a knowledge of draftsmanship is necessary to the modernistic painter.

"The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" opens with a scene in *Aubrey's* rooms, in which with careful casualness the point of view of his friends toward marriage with a social outcast is set forth, and we get a suspicion of what is coming. Then *Cayley Drummle* is told of *Aubrey's* proposed marriage, and we know. Then, finally, the woman herself appears—indiscreetly, as befits her character—and we see what sort she is. The act leaves us in possession of all necessary facts, not without sympathy for both principals, and intensely curious to see how this marriage will turn out.

In Act II we begin at once to see what is happening. The pair have been cut by society, *Paula* is bored by lonely life in the country, and the frigid prig of a daughter has turned up, of whom she is intensely jealous. We see that the daughter cannot abide *Paula,* and suspect that is because (rather naturally) she senses the sort of woman *Paula* has been. *Paula,* enraged by the girl's coldness, by her own jealousy and boredom, flies into a vulgar fit when at length a neighbor calls, with an offer to take the daughter to Paris on a trip. She quarrels with her husband, and sends for some of her old friends to visit her.

In the third act, there the friends are—impossible creatures, whom *Paula* herself can no longer tolerate. She and *Aubrey* haven't spoken since the quarrel. She has even intercepted his letters from his daughter. She is ashamed, miserable, profoundly unhappy. Then *Ellean* suddenly comes back.

She is engaged! In her new happiness, she kisses *Paula.* Things seem to be going better. Perhaps there will be a way out, after all. But *Ellean's* lover appears. Lo, he is a man who once "kept house" with *Paula.* Smitten by this intolerable situation, *Paula* tells him he has got to break off the match. He refuses. She declares that if he doesn't, she will, and the act ends on a tense emotional note, and with suspense at a high pitch.

Act IV takes up the story exactly where Act III left it. *Paula* tells her husband. *Ellean* guesses the relations between her lover and her stepmother, and flies out at her. There is a terrible scene. Then *Paula* has a scene with *Aubrey,* in which she pathetically pictures what their future will be as her beauty fades and he "sickens of her"—and goes out and kills herself.

As this story is ordered, it moves smoothly and naturally toward its end. It is confined to the one theme, it is condensed in place and time to concentrate on that theme, all its characters contribute to it naturally; yet it is so arranged that suspense constantly tightens, there is an ever increasing emotional pressure, the actors, starting on a low key, rise in the intensity of expression, and toward the close there is no time break between acts, but it speeds up to its conclusion. There is copious opportunity for acting, especially in the part of *Paula,* and in that of *Cayley Drummle,* who furnishes the contrast of comedy. It illustrates, in other words, the formula of the well-made play.

This smooth, well oiled machinery, this creation of mounting suspense without any of the apparent tricks of the older melodrama, these chances for emotional acting which fitted naturally into the story and could not be detected as stunt performances, were alone enough to explain the success of

"The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" in the '90's. But, of course, there was much more. Pinero was, for one thing, "daring." Here was a play about a man who marries a scarlet woman, and attempts to make her respectable. And here was the scarlet woman, seriously studied on the stage. Could such a marriage possibly turn out well? What would happen if—if—well, if somebody we knew married such a person, and brought her to live in our town? Oh, my goodness, what a terrible idea! Let's go at once and see what Pinero has to say about it! Here, then, was a "problem play," posing a social question. Possibly it wasn't a social question very close to the lives of most of us, but at least it was piquant.

Moreover, here was a play of contemporary characters rather than stock figures out of the past, and at least one of them, *Paula,* was studied to give the actress an opportunity to show us how such a woman would look, act, feel, talk—or so it seemed to us. Here wasn't histrionic emotion for its own sake, apparently, but for the sake of enlarging our insight into human character and the effects of social customs. That, above other reasons, was why we youngsters in the '90's so eagerly hailed "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray."

Mr. Shaw, of course, pooh-poohed it, and the truth probably lies somewhere between our enthusiasm and Shaw's scorn. To Shaw a man who would marry such a woman just because his first wife was an iceberg was little better than a moron, anyhow, and not worth attention in a play. When you got down to cold facts, it put his passion on too animal a basis, perhaps. To Shaw, too, whose interest in social questions was profound and sought out first causes, while Pinero's interest was chiefly, no doubt, in making a play, what forced *Paula* into her past life was a more interesting study than how she later reacted to respectability; and when *Aubrey*

hinted that her troubles resulted from the "living a man's life" attitude of society, we can fancy Shaw snorting, "There's your play, you idiot!" Shaw, also, regarded *Ellean* with unconcealed contempt. She wasn't, certainly, the young woman of to-day. She was an impossible fiction of innocence and priggishness, and annoyed G. B. S. excessively. Finally, in the construction of the drama, the catastrophe is brought about by the very longest arm of coincidence—an old lover of *Paula's* turns up as the fiancé of *Ellean*. Taking the population of England as a base, the real chances of this were about one to several million. This is utterly arbitrary, then. *It isn't causing character to determine plot at all.* It is old-fashioned play writing, not new. A truly modern construction, Shaw implied, would bring on the catastrophe (if any) through the interactions of the three major characters, one on the other, as their living together laid their real natures bare; and perhaps if Shaw had written the play the catastrophe would have been that *Paula* exploded out of this impossibly smug world of British social self-satisfaction, not a pathetic figure, but a blazing one!

His criticism of the play so far as its catastrophe through coincidence, not character, is concerned is perfectly fair. Pinero remains a theatrical dramatist, not a real follower of Ibsen, in that respect at least. But Shaw's scorn of the "philosophy" of the play is not so fair, because Shaw himself was dedicated to blasting British social self-satisfaction out of its smug complacency, he was campaigning for a new attitude, and he was displeased with anything which accepted the old. Pinero certainly accepted the common social attitudes of his day, just as Jones did. For that reason "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" in our generation seems out of date. But for that reason, also, in 1893 it was vitally alive, and could

reach more people than the plays of G. B. Shaw, which lay unacted in that obstreperous critic's desk because the managers couldn't understand them.

If the student is curious to see how a man like Jones was also affected by the well-made play, let him read "Mrs. Dane's Defence," with its tense cross-examination scene; and if he wishes to follow Pinero's career after the epoch-making "Tanqueray," let him read "Mid-Channel" or "The Thunderbolt," both written in the first decade of the twentieth century, both still keeping the well-made play technique, the spiralling excitement, the constant emotional pressure, but both cutting rather deeper and surer into human problems.

31

G. B. SHAW

During the first quarter of the nineteenth century the figure of the Scotch-Irishman, George Bernard Shaw, did "bestride the narrow world" of the English stage "like a Colossus." Indeed, he had one foot in America, and the other as far east as Moscow. Time alone can determine whether his plays will endure, but there can be no question of their enormous influence in their own day. Beginning as a second rate novelist, then a music, art and drama critic, Shaw in the '90's fought for Ibsen brilliantly (as he had fought for Wagner), and began writing plays himself. He not only wrote them—he talked about them. He said they were better than Shakespeare's, which of course caused considerable flutter in critical dovecotes—as he intended. Two of them, "Arms and the Man" and "The Devil's Disciple," were acted in America in 1894 and 1897 by the brilliant Richard Mansfield, where they caused no little bewilderment. In England his plays were first produced by the highbrow Stage Society. Early in the new century an American actor, Arnold Daly, first made Shaw known to a general public with the emphasis on the revolutionary aspect of his plays. Very speedily, in both countries, they conquered the stage, they were issued in book form with long and fascinating prefaces and sold like novels; they were attacked by old-time critics; one of them, "Mrs. Warren's Profession," was closed by the police in New Haven and New York in 1905; they were translated into

foreign languages; and the name Shaw, the adjective Shavian, became universally known.

Part of Shaw's hold lay, of course, in the variety of his contacts with modern life. He was deeply interested in economic and political questions, and was trained as a public speaker on political and social topics. He was a brilliant writer. He was widely read in many literatures, and had felt the impact of many philosophies and new currents in art. He was profoundly serious-minded at bottom and hated sentimentality and romantic evasions; he was a realist in the philosophical rather than the narrower art sense of the word. His religion was that of creative evolution, which implies a profound faith in human capacity, human will. In short, he was an enormously positive person.

But, in addition, Shaw was also a born comic dramatist. Not only did he possess the most brilliant wit of his age in England, but the inescapable faculty of putting that wit into the mouths of characters on the stage, and into situations on the stage, so that in his plays the fun is almost incessant. No matter how serious, no matter how satirical, the play may be, it always crackles. The result was a body of drama, the Shavian theatre, which is unique in literature. If it were necessary to try to pack Shaw into a sentence, we might say that he is a combination of Ibsen's philosophic and social purpose, Wycherley's mordant satire, and Congreve's glittering wit. Which, after all, wouldn't mean much of anything. Shaw is Shaw. He is unique.

The reason he said his plays were better than Shakespeare's is because Shakespeare accepted the universe passively, reasoned not at all about the why and wherefore, and had a romantic attitude toward his characters. The reason Shaw's plays at first were so difficult to grasp was because he accepted

nothing passively, not even the universe. He turned accepted notions upside down, as in "Arms and the Man," the first of his dramas acted in America. This play "debunked" war a full generation before "What Price Glory," and told a people with the tin-pot heroics and tainted beef of the Spanish-American fracas not yet out of their systems that a soldier fought on his stomach and wars were properly conducted by the commissary. His plays, too, were difficult of acceptance by the older critics because more and more he grew scornful of "situation" and emotional scenes, threw overboard the technique of the well-made play, substituted conversations for physical action and mental drama for emotional. "This isn't, of course, a play," said the critics, with Pinero in mind.

"A play," Shaw retorted, "is anything which interests an audience for two hours and a half, on the stage of a theatre."

His range was great. He went back to Julius Cæsar in history, and created a new type of historical drama, in which ancient figures were brought to life by treating them as if they were contemporaries, and with realistic, ironic humor. In this alone, his influence can be felt not only in drama, but in much modern historical literature and biography. He rewrote the Pygmalion and Galatea legend in terms of to-day. He made a serious study of prostitution to show its economic causes—a play without any sentimental gloss, any erotic appeal whatever, hard, cold, remorseless. He laughed at the theory that man proposes, showing Don Juan to have been pursued by the "life force" which is in women. He wrote Comedies of Manners crackling with wit, but cutting deep below the surface. In "Androcles and the Lion" he set forth fundamental Christianity against the overlay of theology. In his three-day drama, "Back to Methuselah," he set

forth the gospel of creative evolution; it is a religious drama. And all his plays were published with prefaces, eagerly read and greatly influencing the thought of his age. For thirty years this now aged gentleman has been the most flashing, fascinating, and domineering figure in the world of English letters, and still some people wonder whether they should take him seriously!

"Arms and the Man"

In choosing two of Shaw's plays for detailed study, it would be perhaps most illuminating to take, first, "Arms and the Man," his earliest play to be produced (1894) and one, too, which is still frequently acted and has doubtless been seen by many students on the stage, and then to take a later play in which some of his most characteristic and obvious technical departures from the accepted play-writing standards of his day are manifest. Such a play might well be "Getting Married" (1908).

"Arms and the Man" was written and produced in 1894, while "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" was still a sensation. But it obviously does not follow the formula of the "well-made play." Not quite so obviously, it is—is it not?—a three-act Comedy of Manners. The first act, which is almost a prologue to a two-act comedy, is too brisk and humorous and direct for a "well-made play." It begins, to be sure, on what promises to be a romantic and melodramatic note—night, a girl's chamber, a battle outside, a soldier climbing in the window for refuge, all quickly, neatly and effectively sketched. But in the Pinero drama more would have been made of the enveloping atmosphere of night and battle, leading up to our intense excitement when *Raina* hides *Bluntschli* behind the curtain and our emotional interest in her feelings toward

him. Actually we are not much excited. We feel the situation merely as devised to get the story going for quite other purposes than emotional excitement. What those purposes are we have more than a hint in *Bluntschli's* calmness when *Raina* gets his pistol. It isn't loaded! That revelation brings a little shock of surprise, and a laugh. It is a twist of plot to maintain stage interest—but it is much more. It is a sharp introduction to satire, to Shaw's statement, through his play, that war is not a matter of heroics but, among other things, of commissary departments. The chocolate cream episode and the description of *Sergius'* cavalry charge have the same purpose—to emphasize a realistic attitude toward war. As Congreve used intrigue to carry along a story interest sufficient to give excuse for his wit and style, Shaw here uses it to carry along story interest sufficient to keep the audience watching his characters and listening to those things they say which reveal Shaw's own attitude toward many deeper matters, such as war and romanticism. The act ends with the assurance that *Bluntschli* will be smuggled to safety, and a brief, humorous hint of *Raina's* feeling toward him when she and her mother find him asleep on her bed. Incidentally, anyone who has heard a good actress, playing *Raina,* exclaim, "Don't, Mamma; the poor dear is worn out," does not need to be assured Shaw knows how to give his players a chance to act.

The rest of the play, so far as the story goes, merely resolves the simple intrigue. The women have given *Bluntschli* the *Major's* coat to escape in. The *Major* and *Sergius* come home from the war, and *Bluntschli,* too, comes back to return the coat. How shall the women keep the knowledge of their intrigue from the *Major*—especially when he demands that coat? They are unable to. Both he and *Sergius*

find out. But nothing exciting happens. Even *Sergius'* challenge is a joke. *Raina* has been cured of her romanticism, and goes to her chocolate cream soldier instead of *Sergius* at the end. Nothing could be much simpler than this framework of story which the "well-made play" would have developed into tense drama, but which Shaw keeps as light and airy as any tale of amorous intrigue in the old Comedy of Manners. Superficially, indeed, his play is a Comedy of Manners. But, of course, its simplicity is deceptive, both because of its bantering tone and its use of such devices as *Bluntschli's* staggering list of all the horses, napkins, spoons and tablecloths he owns, to get comic effect and keep the audience amused. Underneath is a serious purpose, quite as serious as Pinero's in "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," and to discover how this purpose is made manifest is the chief object of study here. It will show us, also, how new forces and ideas were coming into English drama.

Shaw's major purpose seems to have been to laugh romanticism out of court—or, rather, out of courtship; to illustrate what in his preface he calls "scientific natural history." *Bluntschli* was a realist. *Raina* was a splendid creature, who never drew a natural breath. *Sergius,* her betrothed, as we learn from Shaw's stage direction preceding his entrance in Act II, was utterly Byronic. *Louka,* the servant maid, was, again, a realist, who knew exactly what she wanted, which was *Sergius.* So the *real story,* or plot, of these two acts is not at all the superficial intrigue of the women, the episode of the coat, but the process which goes on in *Raina* to make her swing from *Sergius* to *Bluntschli,* and what happens to poor Byronic *Sergius* to throw him to *Louka.* The fact that it is all accomplished in a vein of brisk comedy does not change the seriousness of the purpose—the satire of romanticism, of formulas and attitudes taking the place of common-

sense. In that delicious scene in Act III, when *Raina* finally comes down off her high horse and says simply to *Bluntschli, "How* did you find me out?" is the meat of the matter. What is technically most significant here, perhaps, is the skill with which Shaw keeps all such scenes in the general key of comedy, and ties them all quite logically and naturally into his superficial story of intrigue. Watching the play in the theatre, you are never conscious that a speech or scene has been introduced to put over a satirical idea, to point a general moral. You are conscious only of a group of vividly contrasted and interesting characters involved in an amusing tangle of circumstances. How will they get out of it? And how is this vivid creature, *Raina,* going to get rid of her imagined infatuation for *Sergius* and capture the man worthy of her? In that last speculation even Shaw cannot escape rousing a certain amount of romantic emotion in an audience.

The characters in "Arms and the Man," too, are at bottom "humours," or type characters, in spite of their vividness. No first-rate dramatist, of course, can escape his own genius; his characters are bound to come to individual life. But nevertheless *Raina, Sergius, Bluntschli* are carefully chosen and devised each to symbolize a particular human trait or attitude, and what happens to them is significant, not because it happens to them but because it illustrates the way such attitudes work in society. Raise a handsome young man on Byronic nonsense and you don't get a soldier in battle, you get a blundering and bewildered idiot. Raise a fine girl on romantic nonsense, and nothing can save her from throwing herself away on such an idiot but to have somebody stronger and saner show her up to herself. The applications were far reaching, and the play came at a time, too, when sentimental romanticism was rife on the stage.

"Arms and the Man," then, is superficially a story play in

the Comedy of Manners tradition, with sharply drawn type characters; and holds the interest of an audience in suspense by the comic manipulation of intrigue and suggests the broader lines of its satire by the plainly labelled "humours" of its people. What was revolutionary in it, what was essentially modern, was the nature of this satire, its concern with important general ideas, and the technical craftiness with which the author threaded through his simple story intellectual subtlety. Shaw's intellectual preoccupation with ideas in the drama was in part due to Ibsen, in part to his natural bent. But his choice of the Comedy of Manners rather than the carefully wrought out, suspensive, emotional well-made play as a mold to shape them in was entirely, of course, the result of his natural predisposition, his dry, shrewd humor and impatience with elaborate artifice.

"Getting Married"

It might be a matter for debate how far the slight but clean-cut and merry story of "Arms and the Man" is responsible for its continued popularity on the stage, after more than thirty years. "Getting Married," written in 1908 and produced when the Shaw vogue was at its first height, is now infrequently performed, although the ideas with which it is concerned are certainly no less vital to-day than those of "Arms and the Man." In this comedy we see Shaw's "drama of ideas" reach a logical development—*i.e.* the ideas take almost complete possession of the play, the story interest fades almost to nothing, of "action" in the older sense there is next to none at all. A group of people sit in a room, or come and go, debating what's the matter with marriage. To be sure, at the beginning of the play, we learn that the

Bishop's daughter is to be married in an hour. She and the bridegroom, both reluctant to go through with the ceremony, join the debate. Once in a while there is some reference to the guests by now sitting in the church, waiting. If we took the play seriously, as a realistic picture, we'd feel rather unhappy about those poor guests! Finally, the bride and groom sneak away and get the beadle to marry them. And that's the end.

Moreover, as the play is printed, there are no act divisions. It is a two-hour-and-a-half one-act play! Being a debate, Shaw adopted the three unities of Greek drama, keeping time and place and action all together. In performance, of course, there had to be two arbitrary intermissions to rest the audience.

It is small wonder that many critics of the play declared it was not a play at all, but a "dramatized conversation." Shaw's retort was, that anything is a play which can, when acted on the stage of a theatre, interest an audience for two hours and a half. "Getting Married" interested an audience. Therefore it is a play. But it certainly is not a play of the kind Pinero wrote, or that Shaw himself had written in "Arms and the Man" and "Candida" and "The Devil's Disciple." Those were dramas of ideas, but the ideas, the intellectual element, were held in a story solution. Here the story was negligible. The ideas were everything. Why, then, write a play at all? Why not put them in an essay? Because, Shaw would reply, the stage is the most vivid medium for reaching a large number of people. By putting the ideas into the mouths of vividly drawn and interesting characters, and letting them clash before your very eyes, they will take on greater sharpness than if expressed in any other way. The stage has been too long a slave to childish story telling and

emotional excitement. Let it now be adult and find its excitement in intellectual give and take.

The student of "Getting Married" will, of course, need no guidepost to the ideas in the play. They are stated and restated, and explained at still greater length in the preface. Nor has the discussion of modern marriage, its evils, its possible reforms, ceased to this day. No doubt Shaw's share in precipitating the discussion, and putting it on a much franker and more honest plane, was a large one. But that hardly concerns us here, except as we realize that the subject matter of "Getting Married," and its frankness, were rather new to the theatre in 1908. What we are to seek for in the comedy is the method by which this debate is dramatized so that it can hold an audience. If Shaw has here found a method others can use, then the play marks a definite expansion in the range of the theatre.

The play is in a sense farcical; there is a basic unreality in the situation. From the polyandrous *Leo* to *Mrs. George,* the characters are all a little mad or fantastic. Has Shaw deliberately made them so to keep us amused, to take the dryness out of the debate? But they are carefully and brilliantly contrasted and individualized. We get to know them, to like them—especially the green grocer; and we come at length to take an interest in their individual problems. Before long, we find that nearly every contribution one of them makes to the debate throws a side light on his or her character, increases our interest in his or her individual problem. Early in the play we are prepared for the coming of *Mrs. George,* and are curious to see her. We chuckle at the characteristic remarks of *Rejjy* and *Hotchkiss.* But are we always equally interested in the abstract ideas on marriage which these people set forth? Does the debate tend to grow tiresome? Does our

interest in the characters make us impatient at times to see them move forward into another development of their story? Is the play, after all, too much of an intellectual exercise, which is made tolerable, first, by Shaw's individual brilliance of intellect and expression, and second by his possession of a gift always common to fine dramatists, the gift of creating interesting characters who come alive and make us curious about them?

It is significant, at any rate, that "Getting Married" marks Shaw's outer boundary in "static drama." He has never ceased, of course, to be a dramatist of ideas, a creator of intellectual rather than emotional interest; he writes problem plays and states the problem drily, in terms of comedy and debate. In such later works as "Major Barbara" or "Saint Joan" there are long static passages of debate or even of a one-man "set speech." But there is also story interest in the play as a whole, progression of incident, a greater satisfaction of the natural curiosity roused in the fate of interesting characters. The static drama was for a time much discussed, and others practised it, as Granville Barker in "Madras House." Undoubtedly the discussion aided in loosening up the rigid forms of play writing, but the static drama itself seemed to owe what success it had in the theatre not to any new technique but to the application of old principles of character drawing and revealing dialogue. Without that, and without brilliant intellect in the dramatist, it was a bore. So it was rather through his less radical plays that Shaw had most influence on the theatre, rather through his ability to push home his ideas by adapting his dialogue and his characters to the needs of a progressing story, rather by making more flexible the Comedy of Manners and the chronicle history play. He made comedy, and even farce, a vehicle for his

ideas, a pulpit from which to preach his ethical and social doctrines to the modern world, by keeping them good comedy and good farce, and thus gradually taught us all to look for dramatic excitement in ideas as well as emotions, for humor in situations of the mind as well as of the body.

32

J. M. BARRIE

No writers could be more unlike than G. B. Shaw and J. M. Barrie, save that both are humorists. Although Barrie first began writing for the stage in the 1890's, he was then a successful sentimental novelist (we except that glorious book, "Sentimental Tommy"), and his earlier efforts at drama were sentimental plays of a kind now outmoded. It was not until he wrote "The Admirable Crichton" in 1902 that he found himself in the modern theatre, and during the next two decades produced a large number of plays, both long and short, which won a wide popularity and made his name a household word for a certain kind of wistful sentiment, sly whimsy, and tender humor—for a quality known as Barriesque. No doubt the play which most perfectly combines these qualities, and is perhaps destined to endure in our theatre longer than any other play of our age, is "Peter Pan," written in 1904, produced every year since in London, and revived with enormous success in America in 1928-29. Nobody could have written "Peter Pan" but Barrie, and it seems neither new nor old in matter or manner. It is a play about children and fairies and the boy who never grew up; it is so simple and childlike that children love it as they love Grimm and Andersen, and so wistfully old and subtle that elderly people watch it through misted eyelids, remembering things that are no more. How does play writing like this come into the story of modern drama? How is Barrie important in the story, except as he is a gifted dramatist who

chanced to be writing in this age, and so enriched its total product?

Barrie is important for two reasons, first because in other plays than "Peter Pan," though often superficially concealed by his whimsical humor, he was a satirist, sometimes a profoundly bitter one, who deepened the content of our drama and made the plays of lesser men seem unsatisfactory because they lacked meaning; and secondly, he often achieved reality without realism, he was fantastic, playful, even eerie and supernatural (as in "Mary Rose"), constantly demonstrating that modern drama is not bound in chains to intellectualism, or naturalism, or any formal pattern. In a day when the theatre was full of hard laughter or grim realism or the "debunking" of sentimentality and even old sentiments, he kept a corner of it warm and wild and free.

"The Admirable Crichton"

For illustration of Barrie's direct influence on modern drama, it were best to study his early comedy, "The Admirable Crichton."

"The Admirable Crichton" is a Comedy of Manners, we are sure to declare after reading the first act. It is a satire on the British aristocracy and the snobbishness of pretending once a month that you are democratic. In method it is almost burlesque, for surely no British peer was ever quite so silly as *Lord Loam,* with his tea for the servants. There is certainly nothing meticulously realistic about it—there is far less realism than we found in Jones' "The Liars," which is more carefully plausible. Like Shaw, Barrie seems to joy in comic exaggeration, and like Shaw he can, through it all, bring vivid characters triumphantly to life and give them revealing and amusing things to say. His comic invention is

prodigious. Perhaps it hides his plotting skill, for at the end of the act the whole scene between the daughters, their father and *Crichton,* over the question of a maid for the girls and a servant for *Lord Loam,* while it reveals character and affords amusement, is craftily arranged to make sufficiently plausible *Crichton's* presence on the yacht trip. Barrie doesn't want his audience to ask embarrassing questions when the next act begins.

With the next act, on the desert island, we don't know quite what to call the play. It has elements of "Robinson Crusoe," of the tale of adventure. It has hints of romantic drama in the growing tension between *Crichton* and *Lady Mary.* Satirical comedy is not absent—witness the scene where *Ernest's* head is ducked in the bucket. But above all, it has a growing note of seriousness. Barrie, in a stage direction in the printed text, says *Crichton,* as he sits by his fire, waiting for "Nature" to bring the rebels back, for hunger to make them acknowledge him the superior on this island, "is a strong and perhaps rather sinister figure." From that moment of the act, not another word is spoken. One by one the aristocrats creep humbly back out of the darkness to the light of the fire and the food in the pot, creep back to the feet of their former butler. It is all contrived in pantomime. On the stage, each figure is greeted with laughter by the audience, who get the fun. But *Crichton* doesn't laugh, and *Lady Mary* doesn't laugh, and you suddenly feel a little sorry for this proud girl, and a little awed by the reflection that *you* would creep back, too—unless yours was the strength and the skill to be the one sitting by the pot. *Crichton's* "Nature will decide" isn't quite so funny as it was.

Act III almost transcends "The Swiss Family Robinson" for marvels. You suspect Barrie to be having a bit of fun

in laying on *Crichton's* accomplishments quite so thick. *Where* did he get electric light bulbs? He is in supreme command. The others are his servants. *Lady Mary* ("Polly" now) waits on him at table. She has shot a buck that day with a bow and arrow, and describes the chase in a speech which can surely be nothing else than a burlesque of *Lady Gay Spanker's* hunting speech in "London Assurance." The switch in station between *Crichton* and his former employers is itself a burlesque, so comically exaggerated is it. But the romantic scene between *Crichton* and *Mary,* the quaint jealousy of poor *Tweeny,* and *Crichton's* renunciation of leadership and love when the English ship appears, are all real, are moving, human and sincere. It gives the act a quality, after all, of romantic drama.

In Act IV we are back where we started, in Mayfair, but the play cannot again become a Comedy of Manners. We have seen *Crichton* as the real man of them all under primitive conditions. We have witnessed his love for *Mary,* and her love for him. Our genuine sympathies have been engaged. But back in England, Barrie says, Nature does not work directly but through society, and so *Lord Loam* is now the superior again and *Crichton* the butler. Everybody slips back into the old grooves, though *Ernest* is for a moment thrown into consternation when he sees *Crichton* getting that bucket just as he has made an epigram. *Lady Mary* returns to her worthless Lordling. The only consolation left to a romantic auditor is the expectation that *Tweeny* may get *Crichton,* after all. The romantic auditor, or reader, would of course like to see *Crichton* walk off with *Lady Mary*—maybe bring her to America and go into the contracting business! But Barrie admits of no such possibility. The circle is rounded. All is as it was.

In spite of the fun, the burlesque, the comic exaggeration of this fable, it is in the end a profoundly bitter satire—far more bitter than anything Shaw ever wrote. Indeed, Shaw is never bitter. But Barrie here almost brutally holds a whole social set up to ridicule, shows their butler, in a real emergency, as vastly their superior, even in the matter of honor, of "playing the game"; and then declares that in our social organization this butler, if born a butler, must always remain so, that social distinctions of "superiority" are more than man can master. The veiled contempt for social superiority is intense and so is the contempt for that type of romantic fiction which would tack on a "happy ending" which the bitter facts of life do not warrant. *Crichton* is a tragic figure at the close, though his last speech but one brings a laugh from the audience—"My Lady, not even from you can I listen to a word against England." Here, then, is neither a Comedy of Manners as the older stage had known that form, nor a romantic comedy or adventure story as the Victorians had known them. Superficially, it was exaggerated, unreal, a thing built for fun making and dramatic contrast. But beneath it had a profound and bitter meaning, a sharp intellectual point. It was modern drama.

"Dear Brutus"

The author of this book would not be so callous as to suggest that anyone study "Peter Pan." It is a thing to be seen in the theatre if possible, or else read with a congenial companion for sheer enjoyment. Out of such enjoyment will best come a realization of that elfin and tender and wistful side of Barrie which belongs to the ages. Nor has it influenced later play writing. Too obviously for any dramatist to ignore, it cannot be imitated. But such a play as "Dear Brutus"

(1917)—like "The Admirable Crichton," first acted in America by William Gillette—illustrates both the elfin and tender Barrie, the sentimental Barrie, and Barrie the bitter satirist, while also performing the difficult feat of dramatizing the supernatural. The modern drama, in a sceptic age that has long lost belief in the supernatural, can make no such use of ghosts and witches as Shakespeare made. Moreover, it got its start in realism, and is still to a large extent realistic; and realism and supernaturalism ill combine. Yet the supernatural offers to our imaginations possibilities of poetic suggestion, of profoundly absorbing story, which we cannot afford to give up. In "Dear Brutus" Barrie took real people into unreality and brought them back shaken; he used the supernatural to illustrate what he considered truths about our souls which he could illustrate in no other way; just as Ibsen did, perhaps, in the last act of "Peer Gynt." But "Peer Gynt" was primarily a poem. "Dear Brutus" is a prose drama, told in realistic idiom. It was valuable for its purpose, and for its technique. Such dramas as "Outward Bound" by Sutton Vane are illustrations of a similar technique, perhaps inspired by Barrie; and they do much to enrich the imaginative suggestion of the modern theatre.

It will be seen at once by the student, reading Barrie's opening stage directions for "Dear Brutus," that he desires to employ the full resources of the modern switchboard and scenic art in creating immediately an air of suspense, of mystery, of something out of the ordinary, even ominous. Nor does he ignore the careful plotting of the "well-made" play. What is it these women who come in, switch on the lights, and begin scheming, want of *Matey?* Ah, to get their rings back. But no, not really. That is only to tell us, the audience, that *Matey* is a crook, and let him explain how he took the

wrong turning—and to increase our suspense. What really they want to know is, why are they all here in this strange creature *Lob's* house? What is he up to? What is going to happen? *Matey* tells them only enough to deepen the mystery, but while that is taking place, note how without our being aware of it we are learning something important about each of the women. Enough of their characters, and of their pasts, is revealed to us so that we know them all. *Lob* himself—strangest of characters—is, we are just permitted to fancy, *Puck* come down to us from a midsummer night long ago, and very, very old. He is delicately unreal, oddly sinister, and quaintly comic. Then the other characters are gotten neatly and plausibly off stage to dress for that search for the mysterious wood there has been talk about, in order that *Joanna, Alice* and *Purdie* may have their necessary scenes, and then *Alice* and *Dearth*. Now we have all the information we need about everybody, and are sufficiently curious to learn what all this mystic wood tomfoolery is about. The others come back —*Dearth* draws the shades to go into the garden—and staggers back. What is it—what is it? He pulls the curtains wide open. Where, when the act began, we had plainly seen a pretty English garden in the moonlight, is now a great, dim forest, with giant tree trunks on the very terrace! Well designed and lighted by an imaginative artist, the effect can be electrifying. The mystic wood has materialized. It is the wood where everybody—so the legend goes—gets his second chance, and one by one these unhappy souls, who think they could do so much better had they their lives to live over again, pass out into it. They don't really believe—but. . . . We, the audience, don't really believe—but. . . . Over us, too, is this mystic spell of curiosity. One character doesn't venture out—old *Mrs. Coade*. She goes to bed. If she had her life

to live again, she'd be just the same—the darling old thing.

And that is Act I. It is a masterly act. It employs to the full the technique of the well-made play, the sustained plausibility, the disguised exposition, the mounting suspense; it succeeds both in explaining just what we are to look for in the supernatural act that follows, and in bringing that act about in such a way that it seems to grow out of the story, and we accept it cheerfully for purposes of this evening in the theatre.

The second act, of course, will suggest to everybody—as it was meant to—the enchanted wood of Shakespeare's play. But what a different midsummer night! *Puck* was then busy keeping the right people apart, the wrong ones together, for a sheer lark. Now this sad, modern little *Lob* is busy giving them all a "second chance," letting them live their lives over again and the discontented marry the ones they wished they had—only to discover they get no nearer happiness and success. There is one exception—*Dearth.* In his second life we see him with a little daughter, one of Barrie's dream children. The scene between father and daughter perhaps carries the Barrie sentiment a little to excess, but it supplies what hope and cheer there is in a bitter act.

Act III gets everybody back into the house, and here the author faces his severest test—to show what happens when they come out from under the spell, to round his play with fresh incident and bring it back into reality. There is hardly a soul here we can any longer regard as a comic figure—we know too much about them and feel too keenly what they will suffer when they come to, especially *Dearth.* There is a bit of the wistful and tender Barrie in the awakening of *Coade,* who has pursued no other lady but only idleness again, and his wife's gentle recognition that she isn't so much

a need as a habit. There is a throb of drama as *Alice* and *Dearth* come back; and intense curiosity for everyone. Again we have masterly play construction. At the very end it is morning. Somebody turns to look at *Lob* who has been asleep in his chair—and he is gone! No—there he is outside. The garden has come back. It is flooded with normal sunlight, and *Lob* is a nice little old man, trimming his roses.

It has been palpable from the beginning of Act II that "Dear Brutus" is a modern version of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and could there be a much clearer illustration of the gulf between the old drama and the new than these two plays, both technically and in their spirit and purpose? Barrie's is meticulously compressed into pattern, realistic even in fantasy, and carefully logical. Its purpose is not to create romantic poetry and hearty fun, but to show that most of us are sad self-deceivers, and if we lived our lives over again would fare just as badly.

> The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars
> But in ourselves . . .

Only *Dearth's* love of children is a gleam of hope. The purpose, then, is serious, the spirit sad and disillusioned. Yes, "Dear Brutus" is a modern play!

The rich body of Barrie's plays, when read entire, contain a surprising amount of this seriousness and disillusion. Perhaps his Peter Pans and Kisses for Cinderella are but a romantic escape from the sadness of his spirit. A play like "Dear Brutus" or "The Will" suggests a greater kinship between Barrie and Hardy than between Barrie and Shaw. Before leaving him, the student might well read his unfinished play, "Shall We Join the Ladies?"—one act of a drama which he may never have intended to finish; or he decided,

perhaps, it would be impossible to live up to the expectations aroused. Here is sheer technique at its best, the technique of creating suspense, of piling it up, of slowly, relentlessly, involving everybody in a web. Barrie's freedom of method in such a play as "Peter Pan," or in the burlesque comedy of "The Admirable Crichton," was not the freedom of ignorance, but of thrice-assured skill. He has—and so has Shaw —complete command of the developed realistic well-made play. This should be carefully noted, for it is certain that no experiments in free forms of drama can succeed greatly unless their authors, too, have learned to master the technique of solid play construction built up by constant accretion of knowledge from Shakespeare to Pinero.

33

JOHN GALSWORTHY

"Justice"

The third of the triumvirate who dominated the English stage in the two decades before the War was John Galsworthy. Like Barrie, he began his career as a novelist, but unlike Barrie he continued to alternate novels with his plays. Galsworthy possessed neither the rich inventive faculty, nor the humor, nor the roving imagination of either Barrie or Shaw, but he knew exactly what he was about and hewed to his line with extreme precision. In an essay, "Some Platitudes Concerning Drama," he clearly stated his dramatic purpose, and in his plays he illustrated it. Each one of them has its "spire of meaning," each one of them definitely isolates a group of real people who before our eyes live through a situation which tells us something important about them, or the structure of the society in which they live. From his earliest play, "The Silver Box," to his recent "Escape" (1927), Galsworthy the humanitarian, the social observer, puts his characters in situations which illustrate the ironies and imperfections of our social structure, wake our sympathies, and breed a wholesome desire for better understanding, greater tolerance, even practical reform. He is a problem dramatist. His technique is generally that of the well-made play, of Pinero, but somewhat simplified; and his aim always is to reproduce an atmosphere of absolute reality. At the time "The Pigeon" was produced in New York he said,

"That the audience should *live through* something is my hope." The play must seem a real experience. Anything like the fantastic servants' tea party in "The Admirable Crichton," or the delicious madness of everybody in "Getting Married," is not found in his plays, and would not fit with his spirit and purpose. At the same time, the student of his plays will probably feel something a little unreal or unnatural in the rather rigid plotting, the way in which the story is carefully manipulated to a conclusion illustrating his point. "Strife" begins with a suggested compromise measure which is rejected by both sides, capital and labor. After the loss and suffering of the great strike, the trouble is settled by just this compromise agreement. The play rounds a complete circle. It is all a bit too neat and formal for reality. Yet sitting before "Strife" you forget that; you certainly "live through" something. There can be no question of Galsworthy's profound sympathy with the under dog of society, with all humanitarian endeavors at reform. His sympathy is as great and fine as Shaw's. But where Shaw joyously and militantly takes sides, Galsworthy, both as a conscientious realist and rationalist, endeavors to give both sides a full hearing, to remain cool and judicial. This gives, perhaps, a too balanced form to many of his dramas, and results in a certain lack of emotional warmth in the theatre, an indecisive quality. "The Pigeon" is a case in point.

In at least one play, however, his restrained passion of sympathy and understanding flared out at white heat. That play was "Justice" (1910), which resulted in a reform in the English prison system, and when it was produced in America (1916) profoundly stirred large audiences. Technically, it is characteristic of his method, and may well be studied as the chosen example of his play writing.

"Justice" is the tragedy of a man who is not a hero, not an exalted personage thrown down by fate nor unhorsed by any villain. It is the tragedy of a weak young man caught in the toils of the social system. He follows one of his best instincts—to succor the woman he loves; and steals to do it. He is tried and sent to prison. We see him in prison, we see in a graphic and terrible scene of pantomime what solitary confinement can do to a man. He comes out of prison, whipped, afraid, branded. The law is always riding him. He escapes at last by jumping and breaking his neck. The character is carefully and truthfully drawn. There is no question of *Falder's* crime. Any court, anywhere, would jail him for it. The trial scene is realistic; the trial is fair. The prison warders are not represented as brutes. Language, incidents, characters in the play are all natural, and the sequence of events is as probable as life itself. But this carefully realistic and logical plotting and atmosphere do not obscure, they make doubly clear, "the spire of meaning."

That spire of meaning is that you and I, society, are the villains of the play. Not wicked villains, not conscious villains, but the villains none the less. The tragedy of the Greeks, the tragedy of Shakespeare, knew nothing like this; and nothing to the thoughtful spectator so hopeful as this. For if it is not fate which overthrows this pitiful figure, if it is not some concrete villain, but society at large which does it by its laws and attitude, then some time a change in those laws and a change in that attitude may result not in tragedy for the Falders, but in understanding and salvation. It is possible. Justice is taken down out of high Heaven, and put in your hands and mine. Therefore the play descends from an *Œdipus Rex* to a humble *Falder,* from lofty poetry to naturalistic prose. But, underneath, is implicit a deeper

faith, perhaps, in Man, a belief in Shaw's Creative Evolution, a gospel of modernism. The technique of realism and sustained probability of incident, handled by a man of insight and purpose, results in a new type of tragedy and gives to drama a new direction and "spire of meaning." Lillo's blundering tragedy of the London apprentice has at last borne rich fruit in the tragedy of *Falder,* through the combination of modern technique and a new vision of man in society.

Before leaving Galsworthy, it would be wise to read "Escape," not because the spirit of the drama differs from his earlier plays, but because it is a play of episodes, unified by the one character of the escaping convict. How does such a play differ from the Elizabethan drama of numerous episodes? In the earlier drama, of course, the episodic form was used because it offered the easiest way to tell the story, and many brief scenes were of importance only as they got the story along. Here each episode is of equal importance, and is employed to throw one more light on the problem of the escaped convict and society. Each is almost a complete one-act play, yet each is a part of the whole. It is a technique deliberately adopted for a certain definite purpose. The episodic play has been used frequently in recent years, especially for such biographical plays as Drinkwater's "Abraham Lincoln," where the unity is supplied by the character, or again in O'Neill's "Emperor Jones," with a similar unity. For certain purposes, it is a useful technique, giving greater freedom than the tight three- or four-act play. But it is not the freedom of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century drama. It is a deliberate and purposeful adaptation of the technique of the well-made play, and each episode must have its own law of growth and climax.

34

"LOCAL" DRAMA AND THE IRISH REVIVAL—SYNGE AND O'CASEY

The Renaissance of British drama in the 1890's and the early decades of the twentieth century saw two developments which had great influence in our own country—the growth of "local" drama, such as that written in Manchester and especially Ireland, and also the founding of local theatres, often beginning as amateur organizations, where this drama was presented. Much of the Irish drama was written in the one-act form and was simple in theme and construction so that it could easily be produced by amateurs. Added to this attraction was its folk flavor, its humor and poetry. It was, therefore, much acted elsewhere, and gave great impetus to the revival of one-act plays and to the creation of local and folk drama in various parts of the United States and Canada, as well as to the foundation of amateur theatres. Since out of these theatres and out of their training in writing one-act plays have come some of our foremost recent American dramatists, notably Eugene O'Neill and Paul Green, our ultimate debt to the "Manchester school," and still more to the Irish revival, is very great.

The Irish revival began with the publication in 1892 of W. B. Yeats' lyric drama, "The Countess Cathleen." Late in the '90's an attempt was made to start a national theatre, and the student will find an illuminating account of that attempt in George Moore's "Hail and Farewell." In 1904, with the financial aid of Miss A. E. F. Hornimann of London, the

Abbey Theatre, Dublin, was opened with a new play by a new writer, John Millington Synge—"In the Shadow of the Glen." Synge's genius was soon recognized around the world, and his plays, with those of Lady Gregory, Yeats, and others, passed from the Abbey into the wider English repertory. Meanwhile, Miss Hornimann in 1907 went to Manchester and founded the Manchester Repertory Theatre, where for a decade she encouraged and produced plays of local flavor, such as Stanley Houghton's "Hindle Wakes." The "school" of play writing thus encouraged was notable for careful realism, for folk flavor, for its honest attempt to create art work out of native elements, without borrowed romance or literary embellishment. Such American plays as George Kelly's "The Show-Off" or Lulu Vollmer's "Sun Up" owe much to the inspiration of the Manchester school. The student will find "Hindle Wakes" as interesting an example as any to study.

The Irish movement, however, especially as exemplified by the plays of Synge, was not strictly a realistic development. It had, naturally enough, perhaps, a strong infusion of poetry, and the writers sought for a speech which should truthfully represent the flavor of Irish life while at the same time achieving an independent charm. Synge, especially, after living for a time among the Gaelic-speaking Arran Islanders, sought to render their humble lives in English dialogue which would catch their spontaneous metaphor and natural rhythm. He did not like bald realism of dialogue. He wished dramatic speech to be beautiful. He sought, in other words, a modern equivalent of poetic metres, which could legitimately be employed in plays of realistic content. He found it, at least for his own purposes. Imitators, trying to use his rhythms, have not produced quite the same effect of spon-

taneous poetry. But his search for what we may call a naturalistic poetry was taken up by others and still goes on, and may be seen in America to-day in much of the prose of Eugene O'Neill, for example, and in Paul Green's negro dialogue, or even in his southern whites' speeches in such a play as "The Field God."

"In the Shadow of the Glen," Synge's first play, will serve as well as any for study. Its folk quality is at once apparent, and equally apparent is its infinite remoteness either from the begobs and begorra type of comic stage Irishman of the past, or the dashing, romantic, swaggering stage Irishman dear to English drama since George Farquhar's day. There is even a dash of Ibsen's *Nora* in this *Nora's* departure for freedom. But there is comedy, too. It is the dialogue, however, which will attract the greatest attention. Note, in such a speech as *Nora's,* beginning "It's a pitiful thing to be getting old . . ." how it combines the homeliest of imagery with a definite rhythm, a crude, realistic and half-comic picture with brooding wistfulness and poetry. It is Celtic, surely, and in nothing so surely as the touch of poetry on homely things; but the rhythm is Synge's, the peculiar music into which he hammered the Irish peasant speech. In his one-act masterpiece, "Riders to the Sea," this rhythm takes on a solemn, bell-like quality at the end, as haunting and unforgettable as measured verse.

If the student will turn to Scene I of Eugene O'Neill's "The Hairy Ape," and read *Paddy's* long speech about the glories of the old sailing days, the direct influence of Synge will be at once detected. But read *Yank's* long speech immediately following, and note how that concoction of crude, barbaric slang tends, also, to fall into a rhythm of its own, short, sharp, barked out with a piston beat. Here is an

attempt to do the *kind* of thing Synge did, to find a pattern and rhythm for dialogue carrying a realistic content.

In common with all the drama of England, the Irish drama slumped pitifully during and after the Great War. But it has recently revived again with the production of several plays by Sean O'Casey, by many thought to be the most significant dramatist developed in the British Isles since the War. O'Casey was born in the Dublin slums, and his first three plays were realistic pictures of Dublin slum life in the troubled years of civil strife during and after the World War. Both "Juno and the Paycock" and "The Plough and the Stars" have been acted in England and America as well as in Ireland, and greatly admired. Either one may be read and studied to advantage, as in both the same technical peculiarity is found, and introduced for the same purpose. Violating the "rules" of the older formal drama and even the practice of most modern realists, O'Casey constantly mixes up comedy and tragedy in grotesque juxtaposition, not only in alternating scenes but in the same scene. He carries the porter in "Mabeth," as it were, through his entire play. It is a dangerous practice to mix your moods in a play, because it confuses an audience, mixes *their* moods, and too often results in establishing no definite impression. Shakespeare employed the porter to heighten by contrast the terrible scene which had gone before, and to increase the suspense before the revelation. Too often, however, moods are mixed in a play because the author hasn't a clear enough idea of where he is going, has not himself been dominated by any one unifying mood in composition. But O'Casey knows very well where he is going, and he mixes his moods because he himself feels the pathetic irony of the life he is depicting, its comic littleness, its tragic devotion to ideals it but imperfectly understands,

its bitter squalor and its Celtic, childlike and often witty quarrelsomeness. Because there is heartbreak in its humor, and comedy in its noblest gestures, comedy and heartbreak jostle each other in his plays. Perhaps this may best be seen in the second act of "The Plough and the Stars," with the patriotic oratory rising outside of the barroom window, and the drinking and squabbles going on inside—often with the same people alternating from one to the other! The language of O'Casey's characters is wittier and sharper than that of Synge's, as the characters themselves are urban folk, not of the soil; it is much less patterned and poetic. But certainly at times it falls into rhythm, and at times strikes poetic sparks, so that your imagination is caught up by an image, a turn of phrase. Undoubtedly a realist, he is free from any set molds of photographic reproduction, and makes his realism serve his deeper purpose. In his most recent play he has even employed expressionism.

England Since the War

Save for such plays as Galsworthy's "The Skin Game" and Shaw's "Saint Joan" and Somerset Maugham's "The Circle," all the work of men from the pre-War era, the decade following the War, produced little of value on the English stage. Noel Coward and Frederick Lonsdale, repeating the Comedy of Manners formula, and A. A. Milne, indulging in whimsy, were among the more successful dramatists. Their work, however, hardly requires any detailed study. Possibly such a play as Coward's "The Vortex" might be read because the manners it depicts are those of a degenerate society oddly not unlike the Restoration world, and it combines with epigrammatic comedy a cruelly exacerbating dramatic situation worked out with shrewd skill—as when the

"hero's" rising emotion is indicated by his piano playing, the jazz growing wilder and wilder. But on the whole the student's time would be better employed now in turning once more to the American stage.

35

AMERICA AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

The Farces of Charles Hoyt and Gillette's "Secret Service"

When the Civil War began, as we saw from our earlier study, America like England was in a transition period, trying to throw off the shackles of an outworn traditionalism and to find, through various forms of popular entertainment, a new kind of drama to carry the meaning of a new age. Nor was America having less success than England. There is good ground for believing, indeed, that our stage was then the more alert, our audiences more receptive of experiment, our actors keener to respond to new currents. We had evolved the Negro Minstrels as a native form of entertainment; we had brought burlesque to a place where it was both mirthful and intelligent; we had succeeded in putting on the stage many vivid character types drawn from our own life, and in "The Octoroon" Boucicault had hinted at a more sustained and skilful genre drama. But while England in the '60's could develop Tom Robertson, we could do no more than wrestle with the terrible problems of civil war, and then with its aftermath of reconstruction and rehabilitation. For at least ten years after the Civil War there was the usual aftermath of any great war—a moral let-down. During that period burlesque degenerated into "leg shows," as they were even then called, which flourished on almost every stage. Later the sudden and tremendous westward expansion of the

nation, and the industrial expansion of the North, took men's minds away from artistic problems. The South, of course, was too shattered to shelter a theatre. As a result of these many forces, our stage now lagged far behind that of England and the Continent, and we were not ready in the nineties for any such rapid flowering as burst forth in England with the plays of Jones, Pinero, Wilde and Shaw. But we felt the new currents, nonetheless, and our drama was evolving in its own way and without such close touch with European example as England enjoyed.

Of the dramatists who figured in that evolution, Bronson Howard (1842-1908) was a leader. He was the first American dramatist to earn his entire living writing for the stage. Coming somewhat under the influence of French drama, he improved native technique, attempted Comedies of Manners, and finally, in 1888, in "Shenandoah," employed the Civil War as theme—important native material, though his treatment was romantic. The actor, James A. Herne, went farther than Howard. In 1890 he produced, with no popular success, a thoroughly realistic study of a man and two women, "Margaret Flemming," and in 1892 a romantic melodrama, "Shore Acres," which was flavored with such appealing realism of Yankee detail and such simple truth of character that it was a revelation to our audiences in its day. Indeed, he came near making an old New England kitchen the hero of his play. Augustus Thomas, a young man, caught this spirit, and began to write more or less romantic plays about various States, "Arizona," "Alabama," and so on, which played their part in deepening our appreciation of native scenes and realistic detail. In quite another quarter, Harrigan and Hart, carrying on the gay spirit of the older burlesque, concocted and acted their entertainments with song and dance about the

humble life of New York, such as "The Mulligan Guards," and Charles H. Hoyt wrote a long series of farces, some of them with music, which were probably much more important in the evolution of American drama than their literary merits would lead you to suppose when you read them to-day. They were at times close to burlesque. Their technique for rousing mirth was often that of the vaudeville skit. But they were enormously popular; "A Trip to Chinatown" ran for two solid years on Broadway in the early nineties and made for Hoyt $500,000 in five years; and this popularity was due not only to the fact that they were funny, but that they were funny in a typical American idiom, and that they dealt with contemporaneous themes with an underlying vein of good-natured satire. The later plays of George Ade, George M. Cohan, Frank Craven, Kaufman and Connelly, and similar writers of homely, humorous, brisk and satirical American comedy, stem directly from the farces of Charlie Hoyt (he was known as Charlie to all American theatre-goers).

Hoyt's play, "A Texas Steer," was made available for study when Mr. Moses published his "Representative American Dramas, National and Local," and it will be found amply to repay study. It was first produced in 1890, and had a long career on the stage, though the legend is that Hoyt took but five days to write it. However, as Lord Dunsany has confessed that he wrote "A Night at an Inn" between tea and dinner, rapidity of composition need not mean poverty of product. It will be seen at once that the theme of the play is both a social and political satire; it laughs at the contrasts in Washington between Congressmen and their families from the now vanishing frontiers and the older civilization there represented; and it laughs at the methods of electing Congressmen, at the seekers for office, at the whole political

game. It laughs, and never gets sentimental about it. Indeed, in such a little picture as that of the poor negro who expected to be made the Minister to Dahomey, there might easily be stinging pathos—only Hoyt doesn't permit. There is more than a hint, in Hoyt's tone, of the "hard-boiled" attitude of our latter day dramatists, such as the authors of "The Front Page."

But the reader will also be struck, surely, by the fact that Hoyt's treatment of his theme is far less solid than the theme. The theme is real, the treatment is farcical, even to the point of wild burlesque. There is no reality whatever in the way the story is told. It aims not at the mind, but at the muscles of laughter, and doesn't hesitate to employ the methods of the vaudeville actor. Take, for example, in Act I, *Yell's* speech about lynching the Chinese. When *Green* says "Horrible!" he replies, "Well, I dunno. They voted illegally and the purity of the ballot must be preserved. I haven't much sympathy with the Chinese. They've done my washing lately." Yes, of course you laugh. It's good American humor. It sounds like Mark Twain. But of course it is put into the play as a "gag" line. A little later *Bossy* says, "That's so—they'll need refreshments. I'll send over to the brewery right off." Another laugh. But another gag. In Act II, after the family has reached Washington, *Bossy* is talking, when there comes a "crash off left." "Dad's dressing," she remarks and "goes to looking-glass." She went to the looking-glass to have something to do while the audience was laughing, of course, as the Variety artist leans nonchalantly against the proscenium arch.

Later *Gall* says, "Red Dog! One of the finest towns in Texas. All it needs is some good society and a little more rain."

Brander: "Some good society and a little more rain—that's all Hell needs." (*Pause.*)

Naturally there was a pause. When that gag first smote the ears of an American audience the pause had to be a very long one. It is still a good joke. But it is palpably inserted into the play for the laugh. The tag line of the act, "Did it cost Daniel Webster a hundred dollars to kiss your mother?" used to be greeted with even more uproarious laughter, because it was the climax of a developed scene. But the scene was developed for this tag much more than for the purpose of realistic satire. The climax of the third act, with all three Texans whooping madly and firing their revolvers at the ceiling, while the other dinner guests crawl under the table, is of course beyond all bounds of probability, and always was. The audiences of 1890 knew that as well as we do. They were having fun at a farce. The pleasure they took in the underlying satire was more or less unconscious. Their previous drama had not taught them to look for realism of treatment; improbability in the theatre did not make them uncomfortable, as it makes us to-day when the theme is contemporaneous. But they must have relished the clean-cut directness of this farce in telling its story, its competence as farce, just as they relished the jokes. It was a form of popular play writing that could easily be deepened and transformed into comedy in keeping with its theme, without losing its racy native tang and its hold on popular affection. Hence its importance in the story of our theatre.

Just as in England, some years before, actors like Madame Vestris, Charles Mathews and Mrs. Bancroft bore a major share in the work of reform, so in America in the nineties actors like James A. Herne and William Gillette, and producers like David Belasco, played an important part in bring-

ing to our stage the greater realism and probability of action, incident and setting which was needed before serious modern work could be done. All three men often wrote their own plays as well, but that seems to have been due in no small measure to their desire for native material which they could treat after their own fashion as actors or producers.

"Secret Service"

How the rise of native material, handled with increasing attention to probability and at least surface realism, figured in the growth of our drama at this time is well illustrated by William Gillette's play, "Secret Service," in which he himself played the leading rôle, in the year 1896. Here was something fresh and stimulating in its day. Professor Quinn calls this new quality "the realism of action," and the term is a happy one. Moreover, this "realism of action" was destined to play a large part on our stage, working directly on our native farce and our lively melodrama to evolve types of entertainment familiar to us to-day, and characteristic of our life. In Professor Quinn's "Representative American Plays" will be found the printed manuscript of "Secret Service," specially prepared by Gillette with copious stage directions. Without these stage directions the reader would be hard put to sense where the excitement of the play came from; but with them he can imagine it in performance, and he can learn a great deal about the dependence a dramatist places on his players, and especially in this case how that dependence was not upon the players' ability to spout eloquent speeches, but to perform quick, executive actions with the utmost verisimilitude, specifically to show a man of cool, iron nerve and rapid brain "doing his stuff," as we would say to-day, in the face of danger.

Consider, first of all, the meticulous attention, all through the play, as indicated by the stage directions, to realism of setting. Here were no stage rooms made of flapping flats, but solid rooms furnished to the last detail to suggest the place and time. As the play is designed to show the ideal cool, resourceful American in action, the audience isn't left long in doubt that *"Captain Thorne"* is the spy. They suspect it at once, and soon their suspicions are confirmed. The chase is on from the start. But here isn't the crude detective work of "The Silver King." Take, for instance, the first act scene when *Jonas,* the old negro, is searched. It is low, tense, businesslike, thorough. The act ends with *Thorne* suspected by the other stage characters, while we know he is the man they want, and with the promise of a coming situation that will test his nerve and resource.

It comes. He is confronted with his brother, and before our eyes a solution is worked out. The two grapple, fight, work their way as far as possible from the eavesdroppers, hiss a message in each other's ears as they seem to pant in combat, and then the brother, to make a complete job of deception, heroically shoots himself as if he had been wounded by *Thorne.* This is exciting stage action, and superficially plausible. Certainly in the theatre it used to keep the audience on the edge of their seats.

The third act, in the telegraph office, with its paraphernalia of clicking instruments, its air of overtime activity, shows us *Thorne* trying to get the message through. Note the long scene of pure pantomime, when he pastes the signature on the faked dispatch, hears a sound of the spies in the balcony, puts out the light, and goes around with drawn revolver investigating. Contrast this scene, tense, natural, realistic, with the scene in "The Silver King" when *Denver* overhears

Skinner and the rest confess the murder. Actually *Denver* was in almost as much danger as *Thorne,* but he leaps out of hiding in order to shout a melodramatic tag line. That *Thorne,* after numerous exciting complications, does not send the message is set down in the play to his sense of honor and his love of *Edith.* But perhaps the reader will suspect it to be as much due to the dramatist's need of a fourth act complication and a reasonable excuse for a happy ending.

It is easy enough to pick holes in "Secret Service." All the scenes between *Caroline* and young *Wilfred,* which seemed pretty and amusing in their day, now tell as comic relief rather obtruding on the march of the story. *Caroline's* eruption into the telegraph office during war time is surely absurd. Equally absurd, on reflection, is the scene where *Thorne* and his brother are put alone in a room together, knowing that there are eavesdroppers. Under such circumstances, they would have been idiots to recognize each other. But the chief flaw in the whole drama is the pasted signature. Years ago the Hasty Pudding Club at Harvard burlesqued "Secret Service," and the hero of the burlesque pasted on a signature three feet long, with a paper hanger's brush! This stroke went to the heart of the matter. Gillette wasn't quite up to inventing a thorough-going base for his third act. He relied on swiftness and realism of acting to carry him over. Finally, of course, there is no real interest roused in the relations between *Thorne* and *Edith.* It is a purely conventional love story put in because audiences demanded it. The play is a suspense story, designed to keep us fascinated by the spectacle of this brave, cool Yankee, in the hot-bed of his foes, fighting a lone battle, and to keep us convinced, as far as surface detail can accomplish it, that it happened exactly so. It is "realism of action," which is another name for a more convincing kind of melodrama.

Note, finally, that all through the play there is far off cannonading, and red glares of artillery fire seen through the windows, a constant reminder and prod to the nerves, like the tom-tom beats many years later in O'Neill's "The Emperor Jones."

The Civil War played a considerable rôle in the growth of American drama. "Secret Service" was followed in 1899 by Julia Marlowe's production of "Barbara Frietchie" by Clyde Fitch, and by James A. Herne's "Griffith Davenport," the manuscript of which has unfortunately been lost. Clyde Fitch in the '90's wrote several historical romances which did much to recreate their periods in costume and setting and general atmosphere. He made Barbara Frietchie a young girl, in love with a Northern officer, and with no little grace and charm and appreciation of Southern life, wrought an exciting and pathetic story. Herne, however, in his lost play (which was a popular failure) was far more modern in his aims. He sought to depict the *spiritual* conflict of the war, the divisions brought about in a family by divided sympathies. There was no gunfire in his drama, and off stage but always subtly felt was the spirit of Abraham Lincoln. The play was undoubtedly ahead of its time on our stage.

36

DAVID BELASCO, CLYDE FITCH AND WILLIAM VAUGHN MOODY

At the turn of the century, in 1900, David Belasco made a short play, in two scenes, from John Luther Long's short story, "Madame Butterfly." It was acted with great success by Blanche Bates, produced of course by Belasco, and later was made the libretto of an opera by Puccini, in which form it has gone around the world and is probably familiar to everybody. It is a touching and romantic little drama, hardly of tragic dignity, in which the most conspicuous element is the constant heightening of the pathetic mood by the employment of a quaint and charming and amusing broken English in the first happy and then despairing chatter of little *Butterfly*. It is written, and was played, directly at the hearts of an audience. It was devised to rouse emotion, and it does so by the inherent nature of its simple theme and by what seemed, at least, to an American audience a quaint replica of actual Japanese-English. Not only did this speech give the actress plentiful chance to evoke smiles and keep interest alert, but its seeming reality, suggesting pathetic attempts by *Butterfly* to learn her beloved's tongue, immensely increased illusion. The student, of course, cannot realize what contributions Belasco made as producer—the authentic Japanese interior, the crafty lighting which brought on the dawn for the second scene, the singing of the birds, the whole enveloping tender and alien atmosphere. Indeed, the farther we get into our own times on the stage, the more difficult it becomes to understand completely the importance of a past

play, because its method of production may have been an integral part of its effectiveness. But the student can realize how craftily the play closes, on a note prepared for at the start: *Madame Butterfly;* "Too bad those robins didn't nes' again." (*She dies.*) The simplicity of the story, its careful accuracy of setting, its full measure of opportunity given the actress without any forced passages of emotional speech, its honest directness of plot and sentiment alike, were all fresh notes in romantic play writing in our theatre. Nor is it likely that the student can read the play even to-day without responding to its appeal.

A more ample and ambitious play by Belasco, and one which employed an American setting and characters, was played by Miss Bates a few years later, "The Girl of the Golden West." Before leaving Belasco, this play should be read, though again without the glamor of his production it will be hard to grasp what made it so illusive and compelling in its day. It is a romantic melodrama in strong colors, though perhaps the colors are no stronger than the incredibly romantic life of California in the gold-rush days justified. It puts those days upon the stage much as Bret Harte put them into fiction, with the same emphasis on story and sentiment. Belasco's father had been in the thick of that rush, and Belasco himself, a "native son," looked back to California with a kind of homesick romanticism. The sentiment of the play rings true because it represents the glamor the old California has for all who know its history and have felt the shadow of its spell, even despite the filling stations which now dot the desert.

The play, as produced by Belasco, opened with a scenic innovation. A cyclorama, rolled on drums, moved across the stage and showed a path winding down from the *Girl's* cabin

on the mountain, with the moon-lit and snow-capped Sierra above, down and down into the canyon, till it stopped before the door of her saloon. Those who got to the theatre early enough thus arrived at the Polka Dot not from a cab on Broadway, but on foot from a mountain trail. Out of the saloon came the sound of voices and music. The front disappeared, and we were inside. The play began. The mechanical nature of this atmospheric introduction would be rather too obvious to-day, but in 1905 it worked wonders. Like all Belasco sets, the interior of the saloon was authentic to the last detail. It was realism of setting carried to the logical conclusion of actuality—though doubtless the whiskey was cold tea. Equally realistic were the make-up of the character types and the details of the acting. The suave, pasty-cool sheriff (suggesting Bret Harte's *Oakhurst*) might have been written for William Gillette. The story was constantly embellished with humorous or atmospheric details, but yet its main drift was never lost sight of, leading up to that scene where the sheriff, who has come to the *Girl's* cabin in pursuit of her bandit lover, is about to depart and relieve her suspense —and ours, when suddenly a drop of blood falls on his hand from the loft above, where the wounded lover is hidden. But the dramatist had still another situation up his sleeve. *Rance,* instead of killing the road agent at once, yields to the *Girl's* pleading that he and she draw three cold hands for the prisoner. The *Girl* wins, by a trick. She has a full house up her stocking. *Rance,* being a California gambler who always abides by the "cyards," departs. We admire him as a good sport—and we are supposed to admire the *Girl* for being a poor one. But, of course, she has our excited sympathy; she is saving her lover.

Not quite yet, however. He nearly gets caught again in the

last act. This time it isn't a full house up her stocking but a full heart in her bosom which gets him off. Her love for him touches the emotions of her friends, the rough miners. She departs with him, and of course he will now be a better man.

The student of this play can hardly fail, even from the bald text, to sense the theatrical excitement it contains, the excellent plotting to create suspense and to maintain it at high tension. Nor can he miss the opportunities it gives the actors for picturesque sketches and the producer for a romantic and glamorous atmosphere. But neither can the student fail to observe that the *Girl* is lily white, and the road agent a dashing figure all ready for reform, and the realism only skin deep. At bottom the play is a romantic melodrama, quite untouched by the new drama of ideas, the problem play, the search for a spire of meaning. It has no meaning, beyond its undoubtedly sincere and affectionate tribute to the glamor of old California, because its major story is purely conventional. The play explains both why Belasco loomed so large in our theatrical development as a producer and a technician in the smooth, plausible manipulation of suspense, and why he has had so small a share in bringing about drama of deeper purpose and more modern spirit. However, his technical contributions were so great, and his standard, within the limits of his vision, so high, that Belasco's name must always be an honored one in our playhouse; as, indeed, there will always be a place in public regard for so good a romantic melodrama as "The Girl of the Golden West."

Clyde Fitch and William Vaughn Moody

Clyde Fitch, who died in his prime in 1909, was one of the most prolific dramatists we have yet produced in America,

and possessed as few of our other playwrights have that peculiar power of keen observation combined with the inventive faculty of transferring things observed effectively to the stage, which is the hall-mark of the born dramatic writer. After his early work during the '90's, which mostly consisted of historical romances, such as "Nathan Hale" and "Barbara Frietchie," and beginning with "The Climbers" in 1901, Fitch devoted most of his attention to social satire, to making a record of the manners and customs of his age and social set, and studies of the characters he found in that set. Because his touch was light, and because he wrote often of butterflies, the real purpose which lay beneath did not gain during his lifetime the critical recognition it deserved. He gained popular recognition, however, in abundance, because it was part of his dramatic creed that a play should have entertainment value, and he saw to it that his plays either amused or roused the emotions of the public. Fitch was a cosmopolitan, at home in all the theatres of Europe, and many influences shaped his style. The French well-made play he particularly admired, and its influence is seen in his dramas, as in those of Pinero. But he was also caught by the spell of Wilde, and then Jones and Shaw, in their revival of the Comedy of Manners. He did not, however, seek like Wilde for an artificial glitter. He was a realist and strove to make his dialogue reflect the exact speech of the daily life of such people as he wrote about, just as in his careful sets and stage management he, like Belasco, strove for the illusion of reality. He was not at heart a reformer, like Shaw and like Jones, but a smiling and shrewd observer of the social scene who loved to record what he saw and share his amusement or his pity with an audience. As it was the American scene he observed, his audiences came to a clearer recognition of the possibilities of

native comedy, of social satire, of American drama with an intellectual edge.

"The Climbers," his first important social drama, is by no means his best play. But because nearly every manager in New York refused to produce it, and then, when Miss Amelia Bingham, the actress, did produce it in 1901, it was a huge popular success, and also because without reading it the student can hardly form a conception of how much growth his later plays represent, "The Climbers" must now be our object of attention.

The reason all our managers refused the play was the first act. Never, said they, would the public stand for a funeral turned into comedy. It made a mock of sacred things. The managers, naturally, were quite wrong both about the public and the act. The public howled with delight, and the act, far from mocking at sacred things, poked malicious satire at the shallow people who cannot understand sacred things. The first act, with those weeping hypocrites in black, bargaining over the sale of their dresses, sealed the success of the play. When the first-night curtain went down on that act, in 1901, the audience must have realized that the American drama was beginning to sign its declaration of independence, that here was social satire done with a sure hand and a keen eye, with point and purpose and style.

Just what the student of to-day will make of the rest of the play is another matter. It is apparent even in the first act that the play is not to be for long a Comedy of Manners, but rather a domestic drama, a triangle play, and also if you like a bit of a problem play, discussing both the question of divorce and the evils of Wall Street speculation. How far does it get with either "problem"? The suicide of the husband solves the divorce problem for everybody concerned;

the audience can go home satisfied that *Blanche* has got her worthy lover, without having to divorce her husband. Isn't this, after all, begging, not facing the question? And what evidence is there that Wall Street made *Sterling* dishonest, that he was a victim of the craze for speculation? In an endeavor to remove our sympathies from him to the lover, he is shown to have been weak and dishonest from boyhood. He exists in the play not to comment on Wall Street but to make the necessary trouble for *Blanche* and *Warden,* so we can suffer with them, wonder at their fate, and rejoice with them at the end. Further, does this conventional and emotional drama quite comport with the satirical spirit of the first act? Are the two themes blended? Such questions the student should ask in reading this play, and visioning it as a successful and influential drama of the first years of our century, reaching forward toward a richer native stage.

"The Truth," perhaps Fitch's best play, was produced in 1906. It was not at first successful in this country, partially because of inadequate acting; but it was successful both in London and on the Continent where it was translated and acted in several foreign languages. The student will note that it is a study of character, that it has a spire of meaning or dominating idea, striving to show that what results in the play results because the characters are what they are, and also to show why they are what they are. It does not so much pose a problem as a personality: yet every personality, truly studied, is a problem. Fitch's method of telling his story shows his increased mastery of the newer drama. The first two acts, laid in the *Warder* house in New York, progress naturally, smoothly, involving *Becky* in the web of her deceit with a fine inevitableness and no intrusion of alien or conflicting moods. Yet there is social satire, there is a touch of

the Comedy of Manners. But it is firmly tied into the structure, and is found in the natural small talk and still more the social fibs *Becky* tells, which all contribute to a picture of her character, and to the web she is weaving as well.

The last two acts jump to the apartment of *Becky's* father in Baltimore, and for a time the interest of the play seems rather violently to shift to a new set of characters and another story. Here, in this study of a broken-down gentleman and in this scene between him and his enamored landlady, is amusing social comedy of a rather grim and bitter sort, so entertaining for its own sake that perhaps we do not quite soon enough realize its purpose, which is to explain *Becky,* to tell us why she lied. It was not until a later revival of the play that the part of the father was well enough acted to make this clear to an audience. As soon, of course, as *Becky* arrives on the scene the two threads of story come clearly together and the play moves on to a happy ending which is really justified because we have never doubted the honesty of *Becky's* love for her husband and we are quite ready—are we not?—to admit that so grave a crisis could actually move her to reform.

It was odd that when this play was first produced in New York, John Corbin was almost alone among the critics in recognizing its technical merits, its modernity of spirit, its significance in the American theatre. Yet without it Kelly's "Craig's Wife" or Howard's "The Silver Cord" might never have been written.

If the death of Clyde Fitch in 1909 was a serious loss to our stage, that of William Vaughn Moody a few months later was perhaps an even greater one, for Fitch had already created a large body of drama, while Moody, coming late into the practical playhouse, had written but two plays, "The

Great Divide" and "The Faith Healer," both produced by Henry Miller. Moody still had much to learn, but he also had much to give, much that was needed by our stage. A college professor and poet, he had written text books on literature, several beautiful lyrics, and two "closet" dramas in verse on classic themes, before he attempted a prose drama for practical production. Hearing the story of an eastern girl who, on a lonely ranch, was set upon by three men and offered to marry the least objectionable of the three if he would save her from the others, Moody's imagination was roused and he wrote "The Great Divide," a grave and thoughtful drama far removed from the sensationalism its origin might suggest. Produced first in Chicago by Miss Margaret Anglin, it came to New York in the autumn of 1906, with Henry Miller as *Ghent* and Miss Anglin as *Ruth,* and was immediately recognized as an important as well as moving play, by a new and important author. The present writer well remembers that first night, both for the superb acting and for the sense of discovery, the pride in what seemed to us eager young men a native masterpiece.

To the reader to-day it may seem less than a masterpiece, but if it is read in comparison with "The Girl of the Golden West" especially, it will plainly enough show how it marked an advance in our play writing and a strong, assured and virile grasp of modernity.

It is a curious fact that situations based on actual incidents and people often seem less real in the theatre than invented incidents and people. The father in Fitch's "The Truth," who until he was acted by the right player caused many people to complain of his unreality, was based on a real person. The opening incident in Moody's "The Great Divide," when *Ruth,* to save herself from the two brutes,

offers to go with the third man, *Ghent,* whom she instinctively recognizes as superior, is based on an actual incident, but without the benefit of fine acting in the theatre it is the least illusive part of the play. Perhaps the reader will feel that it is rather skimped in the telling, as if it were the necessary premise on which the rest of the play is based, and the sooner it is over the better. Belasco, certainly, would have spun it out by many an artful dodge to increase our agony of suspense. And right there is the difference between Belasco and Moody, between the old drama and the new. Moody probably didn't know how to spin it out, but he wouldn't have done so had he known. He was not interested in story telling. He was interested in the meaning of his story. That meaning was only to be illustrated by what happened to the man and the woman after they were married, happened in their souls. There is his play. Neither was he interested in realistic speech or colorful secondary characters. The speech he sought was a prose that sounded sufficiently colloquial not to obtrude itself, but which had the dignity of his theme, and could express the ideas he wished to convey. The superficial traits of modern drama meant little to him, one way or the other. It was its deeper spirit he was after.

What, in this play, is that spirit? It is much more than the revolt from Puritanism, which after all is a rather superficial trait of modernism in America. *Ruth's* Puritanism in the play represented the human spirit which is not so much afraid of joy as unable to stand alone, to stand free of tradition, to acknowledge the principle of growth, to tread sin and evil—one's own sin and evil—underfoot, and go on looking forward into a new world. *Ghent,* the roughneck, on the other and the free side of the Great Divide, was the modern man freed of bondage to the introspections of an older civilization

and older creeds. This love that made him over made him a new man who could forget the old one, even be glad of the old one for the opportunity it had brought him. And the play became a contest between these two points of view—a stirring, emotional contest, or it would not have made drama —in the souls of the two characters. The chain of gold nuggets was a visible symbol which figured through the play extremely effectively, suggesting that Moody's instincts for the theatre were sound. But of course it was the universal implications of the theme in our modern life which gave to "The Great Divide" its importance. Between this character of *Stephen Ghent* and the romantic road agent hero of "The Girl of the Golden West" yawned a gulf wider than the Grand Canyon, and deeper. One was a lay figure to rouse romantic emotion for a night, as he was manipulated in a crafty story. The other was a man who carried the depths and the high capacities of our common nature and in his victory over the evil in him, not by negative sacrifice and penitence but by positive grasp of the good that came to him, by a triumphant certainty in the dignity of his own laws of growth, roused thought and admiration. He was not manipulated in a crafty story. The story was reduced to its bare simplicities of spiritual conflict. With a play like this the modern drama in America was coming of age.

37

THE GROWTH OF NATIVE STYLES AND EXPERIMENT

At about the same time that Fitch was at the top of his powers as a social satirist, and Moody was writing "The Great Divide," and David Belasco, in such plays as "The Girl of the Golden West" was carrying on the realism of setting and of action, though fundamentally he remained a sentimental story teller, Eugene Walter, with something of Pinero's technical skill and method, produced "The Easiest Way," Augustus Thomas, who for many years had written plays of American life, achieved a new seriousness with such dramas as "The Witching Hour" and "As a Man Thinks," many younger men came into our playhouse, and for the first time since America had a theatre, the percentage of native plays began to exceed the number of importations.

But, in looking back over the early years of the century, we are inclined to feel that the problem play and the drama of serious character study, even the social comedy, had less direct influence on our theatre than the drama of realistic action, which swept over to native farce and melodrama and shaped them into a new and native mold. Following such sketches as those of Harrigan and Hart, and the farces of Charles Hoyt (like "A Texas Steer") came the comedies of George Ade and of George M. Cohan. Ade dramatized his "Fables in Slang," as it were, creating shrewd, amusing genre pictures of American life, such as "The College Widow."

They could have been written in no other country, and could be fully appreciated in no other country. Cohan, with less knowledge of real life but greater technical skill, wrote farces full of speed and amusing complications, but they differed from farces in the past because they kept to the realism of action; they were superficially plausible and carefully built to ape reality. They raised farce to a new level, where it was potential for satire. "Seven Keys to Baldpate," by Mr. Cohan, a melodrama and farce combined, as it were, is as cleverly built a play as you can find in long search, with surface realism carefully watched, all the old haphazard casualness of farce banished, and with an entertainment value immensely increased thereby.

Like Hoyt before him, George Ade sought in the life of America for those familiar and picturesque types of character which had only to be put on the stage, and set to talking in their natural vocabulary, to be amusing. Frank Craven followed Ade, possessing the same sort of keen, humorous, kindly observation of the American scene, an observation matched, in the graphic arts, by such newspaper cartoonists as Clare Briggs or John T. McCutcheon. But Craven (himself a skilled actor) surpassed Ade in his ability to construct a sound stage story for his characters, and in his desire to keep that story fundamentally as well as superficially real and fresh and untheatrical. His best play, to date, is probably "The First Year" (1920), which had a long career both in America and London, and is still frequently acted by amateurs and stock companies. The simplicity of this little comedy, its wholesome, pleasant sentiment (one hesitates to call it sentimentality), its apparent avoidance of any profound emotion or tensely emotional situation, combine to deceive us into giving it a much lower place than it deserves. It

should be read by all students of our drama, however, and read rather carefully. Note what a commonplace and humble group of small town folks are here assembled, and yet how interested we become in their petty affairs, how decent they are at heart, and how humorous. They come back resilient from any blows, unconsciously triumphant in their good nature. They don't say anything witty; they don't say anything wise and profound. They are "just folks." "Just folks" in a continental drama result generally in an evening of woe. Here they result in comedy. "The First Year" is Main Street quite as much as Sinclair Lewis' famous book, but the other side of the picture. And it is the indigenous American farce-comedy of familiar types raised into a quiet, unpretentious, but genuine art.

Another phase of the realism of action was its application not to farce or genre comedy types, but to melodrama—a direct development, in fact, of Gillette's own use of it. The element of abundant physical action in melodrama makes, of course, for its wide popularity, and also makes it peculiarly popular with a people given, perhaps, rather more to appreciation of action than of thought. At any rate, melodrama has always been popular in America, and is still a favorite type of play. But the new melodrama differs widely from the old because it has first been influenced into surface plausibility by the realism of action, and then bent to the uses of satire and social criticism by the less direct influence of the problem play and modernity in general. Post-war examples of this new type of American melodrama are numerous, and some of them, indeed, may seem to the reader to fall into other categories than melodrama. Such, for instance, might be "What Price Glory," by Lawrence Stallings and Maxwell Anderson (1924). Here, certainly, is the realism of action

—not to mention of speech! Here is melodrama in the sense that at least one act is conditioned not by character but by situation. But here, too, is character studied under the impact of war, and above all, here is implicit and bitterly laughing satire of the "bunk" of military glory. Another example, much more definitely melodrama, is "The Racket," by Bartlett Cormack, produced in 1928. The scene is entirely laid in a Chicago police station, and one object of the play, certainly, is the telling of an exciting story, full of action and suspense, for its own melodramatic sake. But it is equally certain that the author had in mind an exposure of Chicago politics and graft, and by the care he bestowed on the truth and plausibility of character, speech and incident, he achieved a social satire as well as a melodrama. Still another example which might be read with profit is "Spread Eagle," by George S. Brooks and Walter B. Lister (1927). Here, again, is a drama with melodramatic incidents, a story play. But at bottom its intention is that of a satire and problem drama. It sets out, with a bitter sneer, to lay bare the motives, as the authors see them, of the Mexican interventionists. The difference in purpose and effect of all these plays from "The Silver King" is quite apparent. Even more apparent is that difference in "Chicago," by Maurine Watkins, which mingles realism with a burlesque and comic exaggeration, to achieve a mordant satire.

Many of these comedies and melodramas, or similar plays, will probably be familiar to the student, or can be observed on the current stage, which is of course the proper place to study them. But it must not be supposed that even the simplest of them, or those carrying the least weight of satire or "purpose," have been unaffected by the many currents of influence which have flowed back and forth between nations

in recent years, more particularly in America since the War. These influences are so numerous, and so interrelated, that any complete study of them would require an entire volume. But if the student will observe them as they are manifested in a few plays, he will have a key to guide him in watching our theatre as it unfolds to-day.

"The Show-Off"

Suppose we take "The Show-Off" by George Kelly, a comedy produced in 1924 with great popular success. Here is a play that is certainly American, that could not possibly be mistaken for anything else, even if no place were assigned for the action. The reader may at first be disposed to call it a logical development of the American character comedy which so early flourished on our stage, only now the characters chosen are suburban rather than rural. Their slang, their tricks of speech, their turns of phrase and catch words, are all faithfully reproduced, and the very familiarity of them brings us pleasure. Moreover, the play ends with one of those romantic finishes dear to our hearts for a century—somebody makes an invention, the money rolls in, and all are happy. Almost every American, to this day, looks forward with hope; he expects to improve his position in life; and the "hokum" endings of so many of our plays through the years, scorned by the critics and smiled at with superior tolerance by Europeans, probably reflect with entire faithfulness a national trait. As Robert Frost once said, you cannot write Russian novels about a land where life goes so comfortably, nor deny to theatre-goers the kind of ending their own dreams tell them is possible. So far "The Show-Off" is in the direct line of development from *Mose the Fireman,* from George Ade and Frank Craven.

But unless the reader is possessed of a very unusual theatrical sense, he will probably find this play far less entertaining to read than to see in the theatre, and he may even marvel that it was so popular. The reason for that lies deep in the influences coming into our playhouse from many sources in recent years. In the first place, *Aubrey,* the Show-Off, gives the play after all a spire of meaning the older character comedies did not possess, or at any rate lacked the skill to make apparent. Without any sacrifice of individuality, he becomes a kind of symbol of the liar, self-satisfied boaster, egotist, developed in our modern urban society, on street corners, in machine shops, anywhere, and hence a satire of that society itself. He gets his ideas from the tabloids, perhaps. He is full of catch phrases. He is as self-satisfied, as resilient, as much a grafter on life, as empty and as amusing, as the empty but glittering egotists and grafters used to be when they were drawn from what we are pleased to call the higher walks of life, and men in *Aubrey's* class had to work or starve. It may be that the author of this play had nothing more in mind as he wrote than to bring an individual to life, which he certainly did. *Aubrey* lives on every page. Yet the more vivid he is as an individual, the more acid a comment his existence makes on the social and economic changes in our modern world; and the vividness, naturally, is only realized to the full when the living actor plays the rôle on a stage.

Another reason, of course, for the comparative dullness of this play when read, in comparison with its interest when acted, is found in its freedom from bustle and lively dramatic situation of the more physical sort. This lack of "action" is not arranged, as in such a play as Shaw's "Getting Married," to enable the characters to discuss an intellectual proposition, but merely to enable them to talk, to go

about their humble living, to establish an illusion of absolute veracity. Here we may detect the influence of Continental naturalism, rather more strongly than in almost any other American play. It is a tribute to Kelly's skill that he can interest us in long passages of speech so exactly like the real talk of such people that in the flesh it would bore us. But he also had the aid of modern stage management and modern acting. Here is another influence which cannot be ignored. The modern actor in a play like this, and the modern stage director, work together to give the effect of actual life, apparently ignoring the audience and tracking down inflections, gestures, pauses, bits of "business," which would seem to the players of an older age to have very little to do with the job of holding the attention of the people in the theatre seats. But, of course, the attention of an audience can only be held, when you have no lively emotional situations or wit or intellectual sparkle, by compelling them to recognize the truth of your characters and your picture of life. If those characters and that little corner of life you have chosen have, inherently, charm or significance, then they will stay to the end of your play. But of course they won't stay if you cannot compel illusion. A different method of acting and staging is necessary for such plays as "The Show-Off." Indeed, actors trained in this new method often find themselves helpless when called upon to play Shakespeare or Sheridan.

Both the stage director and the stage designer have assumed a much more important place in the modern theatre than they ever had before, because more often than before their work is directly incorporated into the play, which is incomplete without them. As conspicuous in the development of our native theatre as the growth of dramatists has been the growth of stage directors. Perhaps David Belasco was one

of the first Americans to raise directing to an art, so that you could never mistake a play he had put on the stage for the work of any other producer. But to-day, with the increased discrimination of the public, many plays succeed or fail according to the skill with which they are directed, the amount of significant contribution the director makes to the total effect. The dramatist relies on his director to bring out, by various means, an orchestration of appeals, and plans for that as a composer relies on his orchestra leader to bring out the polyphony and rhythms of his score.

"Broadway"

Let us take first a rather simple illustration, and one widely known, the play "Broadway," by Philip Dunning and George Abbott, staged by Mr. Abbott himself in 1926, and thereafter acted throughout the United States and Europe. "Broadway" is a melodrama with a comparatively simple plot. The scene is entirely confined to one place, the back room of a Broadway Night Club; the first two acts take place on a single evening, the third act on the next evening; early in the play one bootlegger kills a rival bootlegger, and at the end of the play the rival's sweetheart, who is employed as a spy in the Night Club troupe of girls, shoots the murderer. Some suspense is created by the presence of a detective, who, you feel sure, suspects the murderer, and who at the end knows what the girl has done but lets her off—a somewhat sentimental touch. A love story is provided by the "hoofer" and one of the dancing girls. The dancing girl, who is lily innocent as only heroines in melodramas can be, shows signs of falling for the bootlegger, but is ultimately saved by her hoofer, and incidentally by the avenging pistol of *Pearl*. That is the whole story. It is commonplace, tawdry, cheap.

And it was meant to be. It is concerned with commonplace, tawdry, cheap life, and its interest lies, over and above the theatrical excitement always found in a tale of shooting and revenge, in the skill and fidelity with which it reports this life, and still more in the way in which it contrives, on the stage, to swing along to a hectic jazz rhythm, to pulse with the very beat of this underworld of seekers for sensation and the strange creatures who pander to their tastes.

This beat is indicated in the text, but its effect can only be guessed by the reader. The stage director, taking advantage of the way the play is constructed, brings his off-stage orchestra into prominence every time the door to the hall is opened; he starts his girls dancing for each number before they go through the door, and the door is left ajar long enough for us to see them swing out on the stage, smiling at an imaginary audience. The imagination goes through the door with them. But the beat, the rhythm of this Night Club life is not alone literally rendered by music. It is caught in the short, rapid speeches, the crude, coarse, but briskly effective repartee, the constant sense of rush and hurry imparted by the changes of costume and dashes in and out. Even the love making and the humor go to a beat of their own, not certainly the old romantic rhythm. The hoofer, who is a likable little coxcomb, a quaintly pathetic egotist, reproaches his sweetheart for failure to observe the proprieties while he proceeds to change his trousers, in a frantic rush to be ready for the next number. They are both quite unaware of any incongruity—which is quite true to the types they represent, but no less amusing to an audience. It may be this grotesque incongruity adds a certain touching quality to the romance, but at any rate it is quite unlike the older romance in melodrama; it is unsentimental and "hard-boiled," and when

acted on the stage must be kept quite off the key of the older sentimentality. The play, then, calls for realism of acting to comport with its realism of speech, setting, incident, and it requires, also, an orchestration by the director of many elements to bind the whole into a swift, stinging picture which rasps the nerves at times like a saxophone, which mingles its humor inextricably with its romance and even its grimmest realism, and distills into dramatic form for two hours and a half the pungent essence of our modern night life in New York.

Expressionism—"The Adding Machine"

Staging "Broadway," however, is a comparatively simple problem to a skilled director. The problems become much more complicated in the many modern plays which depart radically from the older forms of drama, and in handling these more complicated problems the director frequently calls to his aid the ingenuity and imagination of the new scene designers. A style of drama called Expressionism arose in Germany shortly before the War, and has to a greater or less extent affected the drama of other countries. In America plays have been written in direct imitation of German Expressionism, and many more have employed the style, or method, in certain scenes, or else adapted its technique of short scenes and sharp, detached episodes, to make more flexible the older three-act form into which plays were pretty well set at the turn of the century. And in staging all such dramas, the scenic designer assumes a rôle of new importance, his work having to be considered almost always in the final estimate.

What is Expressionism? It may be defined, briefly, as the subjective instead of the objective projection of the characters in the play. In the ordinary play the characters reveal

themselves to you, as people do in life, by what they do and say, and only occasionally, in a flash of insight, can you be sure what is really taking place within them. Modern psychology, indeed, teaches us that much of the time we cannot know what actually is going on within ourselves. Expressionism projects on the stage the inner workings of the characters and places there its chief emphasis. The objective acts of the characters, the story such acts make, are of less interest. It demands of its practitioners both insight and technical inventiveness of a high order, if it is to result in anything more than freakishness, and it puts new strains upon both producer and scenic artist.

Let us consider, as an early example of American Expressionism, "The Adding Machine" by Elmer Rice, produced by the Theatre Guild in 1923, with settings by Lee Simonson. Fortunately the published text of the play contains photographs of the seven sets; though these photographs of course are static while some of the sets were capable of violent movement. The play is less a story than a picture of the soul of *Mr Zero*, genial white-collar slave chained to his desk and his wife and his drab life by his own mediocrity. The first scene, his bedroom, shows him in bed quite silent, however. His wife does all the talking here. She empties her mind upon him. Naturally in the process she puts us in possession of the needful facts about these two characters, but we are hardly aware of that, horribly fascinated as we may well be by the revelation of herself this creature is making. Then the scene changes to *Zero's* desk, where he is engaged with a woman clerk in the endless task of checking up figures. Here the reader will at once see that some of the speeches, by each character, are meant to be heard by the other, while some are not speeches at all in the ordinary sense,

but the inner thoughts and wishes of the characters made audible to the audience—subjective projection. To make clear to the audience which is which is the task of the director, as he coaches his actors. It will be noted, also, that the set is entirely unrealistic—just a platform under a bright illumination. The reason for that presently becomes clear. At the end of the scene, when *Zero* is fired by the *Boss,* he has a brain storm and sees red. That has to be projected. The directions tell how. The platform revolves, there is a rising roar of many noises, then a crash of thunder and the lights go red. Then darkness and the curtain. We have not seen *Zero* murder the *Boss,* we have seen a visible representation in stage terms of the impulse to murder—subjective projection, largely accomplished here by the scenic artist's ingenuity.

The pictured setting for Scene IV will suggest to those who saw that film, "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari," with the uprights all out of plumb. The judge is a mechanical Robot. The jury is composed of the very people *Zero* entertained at the ghastly party the night before—a jury of his peers, you gather. This scene is not a court room, it is his distorted idea of justice. Nobody speaks a word except *Zero,* who now empties his mind, as his wife did earlier—the events leading up to this moment all jumbled hopelessly in his stream of consciousness. Future scenes of the play are not so clear in purpose as the first four; they seem to move into symbolism. But the main objective of the play is clear enough—to project in a new way the soul of one of this world's vulgar and pathetic nonentities. Shakespeare can be acted on a bare platform, by any group of properly trained players. Shaw can be acted, and should be, in conventional realistic sets. But to act "The Adding Machine" and similar dramas successfully the modern scene designer must coöperate, and the elec-

trician, and all elements must be carefully coördinated by a guiding director. In this type of play writing there is unquestionably a challenge to theatre artists which is extremely tonic, a spur to their ingenuity and a prod to their imaginations. But there is a danger, too, in Expressionism which many later dramas have not avoided. The subjective projection of a character's inner being too often means the projection of chaos—witness *Zero's* outpouring on the stand; and in the constant use of this method, with its quick, shifting scenes, the author may easily lose track of his spire of meaning and end in dramatizing a fog. Art, after all, functions to reduce the chaos of life to some temporary order that we may study and observe it. Some of our modern expressionists have reversed the process and put chaos on the stage. That is perhaps why the public have welcomed the new freedom and imaginative quality Expressionism has instilled into the older forms, but have refused on the whole to be stampeded into accepting its out-and-out practice as the new dramatic dispensation.

38

PAUL GREEN AND THE FOLK THEATRE—EUGENE O'NEILL

As the present century goes into its fourth decade, the American theatre finds itself in a chaotic period of transition, with the promise of earlier years to no small extent fulfilled in the achievement of our best dramatists, designers and directors, but without adequate public support and internal organization, and hence with the future in doubt. When the modern renaissance began in our theatre, the playhouse was the chief source of popular entertainment, and a successful play toured the United States. To-day, except in a few of the larger cities, the playhouse has been almost entirely supplanted as a source of entertainment by the motion picture house. Most plays no longer go on extended and profitable tours, but are presented in a few cities, chiefly in New York, at excessively high prices. The drama may almost be said to be a popular art no longer, but an art for the few. Many of our dramatists now write their plays in as obvious a style as possible, in the hope of selling them later for motion pictures, or else seek employment devising "speakies," just as hosts of actors have sought employment before the camera and sound recorder. But this book has quite failed of its purpose if the student, after reading the designated plays and thus at last reaching our modern drama of ideas, has not realized what a long, long time it takes to build up the technique of a significant art, what generations of development and tradition are behind it. The motion pictures are only one generation old, and were but haltingly and fum-

blingly beginning to work out the technique which peculiarly belongs to them, when the newer invention of the synchronized voice came along, and the picture makers had to start all over again, building anew. So far, nearly everything the motion pictures have accomplished of vital and significant art has been in a field apart from the field of the theatre. No judicial observer can possibly maintain that they have produced anything of the slightest weight or value in the field where Shaw, let us say, tills the ground. The "speakies" are still too new a thing to be dogmatic about. They appear to approach, inevitably, closer to the field of the theatre, and as yet their accomplishment, compared to the better drama, is a chromo to a Whistler or a Rembrandt. Yet these two forms of entertainment, one at its best so different, the other at its present best so hopelessly inferior, have by their ease and low cost of transportation and exhibition been able to drive the professional drama almost on the financial rocks, and to erect in opposition to the older and dingy theatres new "picture temples" of ornate magnificence, with organs and symphony orchestras and ballets and ushers as marvellous as the Admirable Crichton.

But nevertheless the motion pictures, with or without "sound," remain mechanical reproductions; when silent they are limited in appeal to what can be told in pictures, *i.e.* to the shell of story and the more obvious emotions; and when they are accompanied by phonographic speech that speech cannot take on the fulness and subtlety of the drama, or the accompanying pictures become static; and always it must be mechanical, without the warmth of personality. Spoken drama will survive. The impulse to create it, to act it, or to witness it, is deep-seated. But the theatre, wherein the drama must be witnessed, will have to be reorganized, and that process

of reorganization is going on. To take an active and helpful part in it, during the next decades, is one of the happy privileges of the drama students of to-day.

In this reorganization, the American amateurs, and especially the colleges, are playing an important rôle. In perhaps half the smaller cities to-day where once the drama was presented by travelling companies, there are now amateur groups, often organized into Little or Community Theatres, taking up the burden the professionals have laid down, and in some cases doing the work quite as well, if you take into consideration the choice of plays. In scores of colleges play writing, designing and producing are seriously studied, and out of such courses have come many of our most notable recent dramatists. One of those dramatists is Paul Green, graduate of the play-making courses at the University of North Carolina, author of the Pulitzer prize play for 1926, "In Abraham's Bosom," and an admirable illustration of what a folk theatre can give to the nation. There are no folk motion pictures, nor "speakies." The pictures are standardized products, turned out wholesale from Hollywood, like a motor car or a breakfast food. But Green's plays could come from no place but the corner of the South where he was born and reared, and their value first is to the cultural life of his own State, and only later to the country at large, exactly as the value of the plays of Yeats, Synge and Lady Gregory was first to Ireland. How large a part the literary awakening of Ireland, through its poets and dramatists, played in the later achievement of Irish independence, cannot be exactly reckoned, but it was not inconsiderable. How large a part the literary awakening of North Carolina, through the creation of folk dramas at the State University, will play in the development of the State, and in the increased creative con-

sciousness of the surrounding South, cannot be exactly reckoned, either. But after the movement has produced a Paul Green, and his dramas have been acted in all the towns and cities of the Carolinas, and other writers are endeavoring to interpret the local life in plays, and high schools are organizing dramatic clubs, it is quite apparent that the drama *means something* to North Carolina, that it has a sting of reality, gives a peculiar satisfaction no imported work can give. To furnish such drama, and to foster the local organizations to produce it on the stage, and hence to give to regions of America an opportunity for creative self-expression and self-understanding—instead of leaving them to the standardized ministrations of Hollywood—is one of the tasks of the new theatre in America, one of the most important divisions of its reorganization. Paul Green is important because he proves what genuine and moving art can come out of a sincere devotion to this task.

He has written with equal understanding about the whites and the blacks in North Carolina, though perhaps as yet his best work is about his black friends, for whom he has intense sympathy without sentimental delusions. Their language and metaphor being more picturesque than that of the whites, he has in writing about them been able more fully and happily, because more naturally, to indulge his poetic flair for rhythmical and heightened speech. In some of his negro plays we can feel something of Synge's power to evoke music and moods from the mere sound of words. Let the student turn to the play "White Dresses," in the collection of short negro plays, "Lonesome Road," and he will find displayed Green's power to set vividly before us, in brief compass, a sharp, poignant and pitiful situation, brutally truthful to the facts of life yet redeemed by sympathy and the gift of expressive

language to a grave and dignified beauty. The little play is simple in form, compressed and complete. It sets forth in a single half hour the tragic predicament of a sensitive negro girl, who loves a white boy. The theme, of course, is an old one; but its restatement here is fresh and moving.

In the same volume will be found two other one-act plays, the first and the last in the book, which the student can with profit read, and then turn to Green's first long play, "In Abraham's Bosom," and find them incorporated as the first and last act of that tragedy. Here is an interesting illustration of how a play has grown. As Green, working in the one-act form, hit upon two dramatic aspects of the same general theme, that general theme—the tragedy of the negro who reaches for something beyond his intellectual grasp—took on the form of a long play. But this method of play making has its dangers, as the student can verify for himself by reading the full play, "In Abraham's Bosom." It tends rather to be a series of one-act plays about the same characters than a play where one act melts onward into the next. There is, perhaps, a monotony of mood as well, so that the play seems repetitious. John Drinkwater's "Abraham Lincoln" was an episodic play, really a series of short dramas, and its great success had a great deal to do with the many episodic plays since. But probably Green's play took the shape it did rather from his early training in the short folk drama. His play of white farmers and religious superstition, "The Field God," is not closely knit, either. But the vivid feeling, the impassioned sincerity, the truth and beauty of his work is outstanding, nevertheless, and his future dramas will be watched with interest. He has shown that the sectional drama in America can achieve not only local but national importance.

Eugene O'Neill

As Paul Green represents the sectional development of the new American theatre, Eugene O'Neill represents the development, from amateur beginnings, of the experimental Art Theatre, as well as the academic development begun at Harvard by Professor Baker. O'Neill studied play writing at Harvard in 1914-15, where his ambition was encouraged and his purpose fixed. Like Green, he began writing in the one-act form, and his earliest plays, for the most part short dramas of the sea and sailors, were produced by the Provincetown Players, a group of amateurs. They gave him his chance to practise and grow (just as, incidentally, they later produced Green's two long plays in New York). His first long play was "Beyond the Horizon," which won the Pulitzer prize in 1921 when commercially produced on Broadway. But O'Neill has never been a dramatist who could get on happily with the commercial theatre, because he is restless in experiment, seldom repeating himself—as the commercial playwright is expected to do—and because his themes are serious or tragic, the problems he often sets a producer severe, and his attitude uncompromising. He has won his way now to world-wide recognition as a dramatist very largely by plays produced by experimental and art theatre groups, or in one case—"Anna Christie"—by Arthur Hopkins, least commercial of all commercial managers. The Provincetown Players, Kenneth Macgowan and Robert Edmond Jones, and latterly the Theatre Guild, our most successfully organized Art Theatre, have mounted nearly all his plays. The most difficult of them all, from the producers' standpoint, "Lazarus Laughed," was produced by the Pasadena Community Playhouse, the best amateur theatre in

America. These facts about O'Neill are stated here because they illustrate so clearly the new trend in the American theatre, the organization of artists and audiences into groups for mutual support, free of the whims of the public and able to develop a serious dramatist to the height of his capacity. Such organizations are quite different from the older theatre which gambled on public taste, different in spirit, purpose and financial method, and on their increase in America lies to no small extent the hope of the future.

It is impossible adequately to study the work of O'Neill in one play, or two. He has always been, and still is, in process of growth; he has been peculiarly sensitive to the many influences in the air of the modern world, from his earliest days when he read Strindberg avidly, through a period of realism, then of expressionism, to a late phase when he seems scornful of all technique as such, but seizes on any means quickest and most vividly to express thoughts that trouble him about the deeper problems of modern life. One thing, however, is constant in his plays; even in those which seem superficially most realistic, such as the short sea pieces and "Anna Christie," there is always an underlying note we may call poetry, not only a conscious arrangement of speech to sound overtones beyond the bald dialogue of realism, but a suggestion of something larger than the scene, be it the moon on the water and the tropic night of the Caribbees, or the fog in "Anna Christie" from which the lover comes. Constant, too—and what no doubt gives him his greatest hold over an audience—is his innate ability to come to grips with a situation and wring from it a depth of emotion few other American dramatists can compass.

That he is also sometimes the victim of his virtues must be admitted. There are passages in several of his plays which

are overdrawn, or there is an excess of tension, of misfortune, of manifestations of emotionally hysterical conduct. He lacks, perhaps, the power of self-criticism which often goes with a sense of humor. Certainly, to some people, his tension is disturbing. But without this tension there would be no O'Neill.

The student who is unfamiliar with O'Neill's plays should by all means read one of the early short sea plays, such as "Bound East for Cardiff." In that brief play an injured sailor dies in his bunk—that is all. But the conversation of the other sailors, the blast of the fog whistle outside, the entrance of men in dripping oilskins, establish an air of uncommon veracity with sure, sharp strokes, and as the dying sailor talks to his rough shipmate, *Driscoll,* we seem to catch in little the sailors' world, and we are stirred with simple and primitive sympathy for these simple and primitive men. And ever the sea is outside, till the fog almost drifts down the hatchway. The first production of these sea plays by the Provincetown group has not been forgotten by those who were present. A new force, we at once realized, had entered our theatre.

From the realism of these plays, and of "Beyond the Horizon" and "Anna Christie," to "The Emperor Jones" was not so far as it might seem, for the imaginative element in O'Neill was apparent from the first. Read, now, "The Emperor Jones," a play in eight scenes, which departs radically from realistic form, which makes demands on the producer and scene designer, and puts the burden of acting almost entirely on *Jones* himself. This play is perhaps O'Neill's most nearly perfect longer work, technically considered. It has no excesses, it is completely unified, it moves forward to a foreordained conclusion, rounding the circle. This negro

"Emperor," in scene one, is cocksure and bombastic, though there is a certain odd dignity about him. He is forced to flee from his palace, seeking escape to the coast. Note how the first distant tom-tom beat comes in as ominous warning, and how *Jones'* swagger has to be assumed at the end of the scene, disclosing the beginnings of his fear. The next six scenes show him in the jungle, pursued by that fear, but they are more than six stages of his flight. They are six progressive stages of his rising terror. They are expressionistic rather than realistic, each one a vision his brain conjures up as terror more and more overwhelms him, each one a vision going farther back into his racial past, to the slave market, the slave ship, and then the black superstition of the African jungle. Only *Jones* speaks in these scenes—a long monologue. The designer and producer must help to establish the illusion of terror-stricken visions by scenery, light, action and groupings. What is real beside *Jones* himself is the incessant, nerve-rasping throb of the distant drums, rallying his foes against him. And, after the final terror, he comes out of the bush at the very point where he entered—where his wise foes are waiting to shoot him down. No reading of this play can do it justice, because it calls for so many elements only the theatre can furnish to achieve its effect. But for that reason alone it is a valuable study in the newer theatre art. The throb of the drums alone adds enormously to its mood of impending doom, and its curious, nerve-rasping quality. But it should be noted how every element of the play is calculated not only to combine in an effect over our emotions in the theatre, but to illustrate the central meaning of the drama—to make clear a picture of a primitive mind driven back by terror from its "proud eminence"—self-assumed—to its grim racial childhood, and to death.

Different as the two plays are, this drama and "In Abraham's Bosom" have much in common.

Anyone wishing to follow O'Neill's experimental course should next read "The Hairy Ape," which was also first produced by the Provincetown group, so successfully that it was moved up to Broadway. Several features of this play were experimental, and reflected new tendencies in play writing. Like the early sea plays, "The Hairy Ape" discloses a fo'castle scene, but a different treatment is soon apparent. In place of realism, we have here, slowly increasing in intensity, a method of speech and action which converts *Yank* himself into a kind of mouthpiece for the submerged toilers of the world, and the other stokers into a chorus which has only a mass individuality. Their speech and laughter are "stylized" as the technical phrase has it, cut to a pattern that we may be helped to accept them as a mass. *Yank's* rough, coarse language comes out in short sentences, with reiterated phrases, like piston strokes. By the time the second scene in the fo'castle is reached—Scene IV of the play—the men often not only speak together, but all repeat the same word, "as if their throats were phonograph horns," followed by "a chorus of hard, barking laughter." The scene in the stoke hole illustrates O'Neill's dramatic employment of sound and light. The clanging of shovels, the insistent call of the whistle overhead, the sudden opening of the boiler doors so that great blinding pencils of red light shoot out over the audience, who then see the stokers, and the giant *Yank* in their centre, illumined by this infernal glare, all give added impetus to the curses *Yank* hurls upward at the invisible engineer, and tremendously heighten the contrast between him and the delicate, white-clad girl he suddenly sees staring in horror at him. It is that stare, that horror, which plunges the hot

iron of doubt and hate into his soul, and the greater the dramatic intensity which can be given to the contrast, the better for the play. The scene capitally illustrates both O'Neill's instinctive dramatic power, and his shrewd employment of the resources of the modern theatre. The following scene on Fifth Avenue again employs stylization. The men and women of fashion are made, by masks or heavy make-up, as alike as so many mechanical dolls, because to *Yank* they are all alike —merely a useless class, who have no real existence for him —and yet are so real that when he hits one, he bounces off. The final scene of the play, of course, in the gorilla cage, is sheer symbolism, perhaps rather too obviously so.

Behind this drama lies a purpose not unlike Galsworthy's in "Justice"—to show the tragic plight of a man who is the helpless victim of society. But O'Neill's man comes from the lowest depths, symbolically from the stoke hole, and his tragedy is the result of an attempt to understand this complicated social system and the shattering of his self-confidence. O'Neill's method, however, is totally unlike Galsworthy's; it is the method not of a realist but a poet striving for short cuts of expression, new dramatic devices, which will release the imagination as the older verse drama used to do. The play is modern in purpose, modern in experimental technique, but in a sense is feeling back from realism toward something very old—the spiritual vision and fervor of the poet.

In two later plays, O'Neill made further use of masks—in "The Great God Brown" with rather bewildering intricacy to symbolize the real and the assumed natures of his characters; in "Lazarus Laughed" to gain sundry effects from his choruses. But as the employment of masks on the stage seems to have been, even with him, a passing fad; and as in his

later published plays he found a less bewildering method of projecting more than one phase of character, the final play to be read may best be "Strange Interlude," produced by the Theatre Guild in January, 1928, becoming immediately one of the most unpredicted yet substantial successes in the history of our theatre.

This now famous play is in nine acts, so that it has to begin at five-thirty in the afternoon, like "Parsifal," letting the audience out for dinner, and beginning again at the usual play hour. One reason for the great length is found in O'Neill's statement that he wished to write a play with the fulness of the novel, carrying his characters through to old age. Of course, he succeeds only partially in attaining the fulness of the novel, because his play begins after one crisis in the life of his heroine has passed; his theme is the emotional disruption of her life due to that crisis. A novel would have included not only this initial crisis, but even scenes preliminary to it. When a dramatist strains after the fulness of another form, is it not a question whether he can ever succeed in attaining it, and whether his own work does not suffer by the excessive length consequent on the attempt? Compression is certainly called for at the beginning of a drama, since preliminary events on the stage are sure to be tame, and the nearer the play can start to its emotional crises, the better chance it has. All good dramatists have known this from the age of Shakespeare. At the other end, too, though by then we have come to take a personal interest in the characters, there is a sense of anticlimax after the peak is passed, and a limit to which the play can go on into passionless old age. The future is left to the imagination. The student of "Strange Interlude" may well consider how far he finds the last act or two of that drama to add either to his interest or understanding.

More interesting, however, than the attempt to capture something of the novel's fulness is O'Neill's device to project the dual aspect of his characters—their outward manifestations, and also their inner thoughts or even their subconscious desires and musings. Abandoning the use of masks, which were arbitrary and confusing in "The Great God Brown," O'Neill here employs the very ancient device of the soliloquy. Soliloquies and asides had been used in drama up to our own day. It was the influence of Ibsen, primarily, which abolished them as something unnatural. They had been used as an easy method to further the plot and make necessary explanations to the audience, and occasionally they had been used somewhat as O'Neill here uses them. Certainly *Hamlet's* famous soliloquy—"To be or not to be," and his "Now might I do it pat," are much more than plot devices; they are spoken thought which reveals the inner workings of the character's mind. The "new psychology," with its doctrine of the unconscious mind, goes beyond thought to the musings and dreams and desires below the threshold of active consciousness, and explains much of our human behavior by the effect of these subconscious processes. But obviously a dramatist cannot reveal by realistic dialogue the subconsciousness of his characters, since it is not known to them; and he can reveal only so much as they consciously think either by the aid of skillful actors or the old-fashioned device of "thinking aloud." O'Neill had attempted to represent the dualism of our natures by masks, and succeeded none too well. In "Strange Interlude" he fell back upon an equally arbitrary device, the soliloquy, a device of language, and had no trouble at all in at least making clear to his audiences both the surface aspects and the underlying natures of his people. In performance, the soliloquies were spoken in a different

tone from the realistic dialogue, or dialogue supposed actually to have been uttered by the characters; and each speaker, in soliloquy, looked out into space while others on the stage sat in frozen silence. It was as if the outer action was for a time suspended, and an inner action was revealed. Instead of resulting in the confusion of the audiences, as was freely predicted, this device, accepted easily before an act had passed, actually pleased and thrilled them. To some it seemed almost as if the drama took on a new dimension. (The scoffers, of course, said it did—the dimension of length!)

Without the device, at any rate, O'Neill could hardly have made endurable his strange story, which in its bald outlines is as crude a tale of sexual neurasthenia as ever was set on a stage. But with the device, we get a clinical explanation of actions and motives, and still more we lose the sense of bald reality and the characters take on symbolic significance, each lover of *Nina* symbolizing, as it were, some trait possessed by her ideal mate, to whom her whole being had gone out. Prevented by her father's subconscious selfishness from union with the man who was her ideal, the poor thwarted creature was Everywoman denied the natural fulfilment of her life and driven into vain searchings and discord. No doubt the play is one of great complexity and many meanings—many meanings, perhaps, O'Neill was not aware of—but the point of this study is not an analysis of the meaning of the play, but a realization of its intellectual complexity (in itself a modern manifestation) and its technical devices employed to translate its message into terms of stage drama.

How far, in a way, O'Neill has come here from the well-made play of Pinero is clear at the very start. *Marsden* enters the *Leeds'* library, and while the maid goes to announce him proceeds to soliloquize. This soliloquy, to be sure, introduces

at once the new device of the play and strikes a needed note of warning to the audience; but it is also employed by O'Neill quite shamelessly to get his preliminary exposition out of the way. He has too much work ahead to bother with a long scene, carefully natural, so the audience can be informed without knowing it. Not otherwise did Shakespeare begin "Richard III"—"Now is the winter of our discontent—" The drama, after all, isn't reality, and can't be, O'Neill seems to say. Why all this fuss over the minutiæ of probability, to the possible neglect of more important matters? But the student should watch, as the play progresses, to see whether he neglects the eternal matter of drama, the clash of character and the excitation of emotion. Such a scene as that between *Nina* and *Sam's* mother, for example, surely rouses emotion to a high pitch, even for O'Neill, and the enormous success of the play on the stage is *prima facie* evidence that the dramatic verities have not been violated. It is a drama beyond realism, using the word in the sense of a surface imitation of life; but if it provokes the thought and stirs the emotions of living men and women, then the drama of surface realism is certainly not the last word, and the future, even as each age of the past, offers the opportunity for experiment, for growth and expansion in the technique and the subject matter of the drama. It should be a matter of pride that an American dramatist has been among the foremost pathfinders into this hopeful future.

With this play, we may well leave the American drama, which has here come a long, long way from Royal Tyler's "The Contrast." Any student who has read William Archer's "The Old Drama and the New," and who has also read the plays discussed in this book, will by now have seen why it is that Archer considers the modern drama so much more

important than all the Elizabethan plays save only Shakespeare's, or why Shaw, for that matter, declared his plays were better than Shakespeare's. Whether or not you agree with Archer and Shaw, you know the reason for their opinions. Through realism, realism of stage setting, realism of action and speech, the deeper realism of character portrayal and of plot determined by the characters, not arbitrarily devised by the author for stage effect, dramatists have more and more bound themselves to inherent probability, increasing the difficulties of their task and vastly increasing the intellectual significance of a good play. Shakespeare was a towering genius, who had the gift of poetic speech as none other, and who so vividly conceived individualized characters that many of them are more real than real people. But often his stories were absurd—as "The Merchant of Venice," or romantic tales of a never-never land that have curiously little validity for the modern mind. It is the ideal grandeur or charm of his characters, and the passion or beauty of his language, by which he lives. Without either, most of his contemporaries repose on dusty shelves.

The Restoration comedies hit off with glittering brilliance the social ideals of their age, but they reduced characters to types, and plot to arbitrary intrigue. Following them came almost nothing which lives to-day, because it could not get back to Shakespeare's individualizing characterization nor to a Restoration honesty of contemporary reflection, nor reach forward to realism of story. At last, out of the spontaneous simplicities of the popular theatre, and under the influence of a world-wide movement toward realism, the modern drama was born. It felt back toward the study of individual men and women, not types. It discarded rhetoric and blank verse for natural, human speech. It set its stage with solid

walls and real furniture. It made its characters determine the plot, so that plays became more and more like a page out of life, not out of a romance, and hence more and more by implication a criticism of life. Drama acquired an intellectual background, a purpose beyond that of creating mere thoughtless entertainment, it attracted back into the theatre first-rate literary artists, like Barrie and Shaw and Galsworthy, it took its place once more as a leader among the fine arts, it became the object of serious criticism and study, and wielded a powerful influence over men's minds.

But it also tended to become mechanically formal at times, to become dry and tight in its mold of realism; it failed to give audiences the imaginative release they yearned for, the color and the poetry and the tragic beauty that Shakespeare at his best achieved, and in its preoccupation with surfaces it often failed to probe into the deeper mysteries of spiritual life. Hence there has been a reaction away from realism, making itself felt all over Europe, and in America since 1920. But the reaction has not led dramatists to try to put new wine into old bottles. Rather has it led them to many experiments, both in stage setting and play writing, to find new and modern forms of stage production which shall have flashing suggestiveness or poetic beauty or tragic elevation or intellectual subtlety, without loss of the clarity and truth realism brought to the theatre. In this movement, all nations have played a part, especially perhaps Russia and Germany and the Italian Pirandello. The student who wishes a thorough understanding of his own times will have to make a rather extended study in the theatres of other lands. But no one dramatist has done more by way of successful experiment than Eugene O'Neill, so that a study of his work will at least conclude our survey of drama in English with a

strong hint of the forces now at work, and on a note of patriotic pride. Perhaps patriotic pride has no place in a text book, but we have so long in America taken a secondary place theatrically, both to England and the Continent, that one may be pardoned if at last we look upon our own playhouse and find it in the van.

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"The Contrast," "Pocahontas," "Fashion," and "The Octoroon" will be found in "Representative American Plays," by Arthur Hobson Quinn. The Century Co.

"Specimens of American Drama," 2 vols., edited by Montrose J. Moses (D. Appleton), contain many early American plays.

Professor Quinn's "A History of the American Drama" (vol. I, from the beginnings to the Civil War) (Harper & Bros.), is the standard work on our early plays, and contains a preliminary sketch of the Colonial theatre.

"The Autobiography of an Actress," by Anna Cora Mowatt (1854), and "Rachel in the New World," by Leon Beauvallet (1856), both give fascinating pictures of our mid-nineteenth-century theatre.

Consult, also, "The Actors' Heritage," by Walter Prichard Eaton; "The Career of Dion Boucicault," by Townsend Walsh; "Curiosities of the American Stage," by Laurence Hutton; and the "Autobiography" of Joseph Jefferson.

A recent book of much interest and value is "Gentlemen, Be Seated," by Dailey Parkman and Sigmund Spaeth (Doubleday, Doran Co.), which gives a vivid idea by text, pictures and music, of the oldtime minstrel show.

Professor George Odell's monumental "Annals of the New York Stage" goes more minutely into the origins of our Colonial theatre than any other work.

REFERENCES, SEC. 28

"Caste" will be found in Matthews and Lieder, "The Chief British Dramatists."

Consult "The English Stage," by Augustin Filon, the chapter on Robertson and the Bancrofts. This book, by a Frenchman, is an interesting commentary on the whole period preceding our modern drama.

For an account of the Bancrofts, see "Actors and Actresses of Great Britain and the United States," by Brander Matthews and Laurence Hutton (vol. VII), and also Sir Squire Bancroft's "Empty Chairs."

REFERENCES, SEC. 29

The student, for his own lasting satisfaction, is urged to procure the piano and vocal score of "Pinafore" (and of two or three more of the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas), rather than a mere text; and after reading the text, go back and study it in its relation to the music.

"Pygmalion and Galatea" will be found in "The Chief British Dramatists."

"W. S. Gilbert, His Life and Letters," by Sidney Dark and Rowland Grey (George H. Doran Co.), will be found a useful and interesting book.

REFERENCES, SEC. 30

Both "The Liars" and "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" will be found in "The Chief British Dramatists."

For other plays by Jones, with critical introductions, see the four-volume edition of his plays, edited by Clayton Hamilton. Little Brown & Co.

For other plays by Pinero, also with introductions by Mr. Hamilton, see "The Social Plays of A. W. Pinero," 4 vols. E. P. Dutton & Co.

Mr. Hamilton, however, rather excessively admires both Jones and Pinero, praising their works too often not as steps in an evolutionary process, but as the end of a process. To balance his judgment, read the introductory chapters of "Modern English Playwrights," by John W. Cunliffe (Harper & Bros.); and also, of course, all reviews of their plays in G. B. Shaw's "Dramatic Opinions and Essays." Brentano's, 2 vols.

The best play by Oscar Wilde is "The Importance of Being Earnest." See "Representative British Dramas, Victorian and Modern," by Montrose J. Moses. Little Brown & Co.

By all means read Archer's "The Old Drama and the New," pp. 306 ff.

See also Henry Arthur Jones' "The Foundations of a National Drama" (Geo. H. Doran Co., 1912), especially the chapter, "Literature and the Modern Drama."

REFERENCES, SEC. 31

Shaw's plays are not available in collections. They are all published, in America, by Brentano's, and needless to say should be in every dramatic library.

Shaw has written so much about his plays, and about himself, and done it so much better than anybody else, that there is little need to go beyond his own prefaces for an understanding of his work. However, Thomas H. Dickinson's "An Outline of Contemporary Drama" (Houghton Mifflin) may be consulted for the European influences detectable in his dramas.

See, also, the outlines of study in Barrett H. Clark's "A Study of the Modern Drama" (D. Appleton & Co.). This is a valuable book for the student, as it includes the works of all leading European dramatists, and provides a guiding thread through the maze of modernity.

REFERENCES, SEC. 32

The complete dramatic works of J. M. Barrie are issued in one volume by Chas. Scribner's Sons, and are well worth possessing.

Consult Barrett H. Clark's "A Study of the Modern Drama."

REFERENCES, SEC. 33

The plays of Galsworthy are issued in one volume, and separately, by Chas. Scribner's Sons.

But the student must also read the essay, "Some Platitudes Concerning the Drama," in "The Inn of Tranquility."

See also "John Galsworthy as a Dramatic Artist," by R. H. Coats. Chas. Scribner's Sons.

REFERENCES, SEC. 34

Synge's "The Shadow of the Glen," and "Riders of the Sea" are published together. J. B. Luce Co., Boston. Also in "Representative British Drama," by Montrose J. Moses, and "One-Act Plays by Modern Authors," edited by H. L. Cohen (Harcourt, Brace & Co.).

The plays of O'Casey are published by the Macmillan Co.

A particularly interesting account of the first Irish production of "The Plough and the Stars" will be found in John W. Cunliffe's "Modern English Playwrights." See also "The Irish Drama," by Andrew E. Malone (Chas. Scribner's Sons).

REFERENCES, SEC. 35

The text of "A Texas Steer" is in Montrose J. Moses' "Representative American Dramas, National and Local." Little Brown & Co.

The text of "Secret Service" will be found in Arthur Hobson Quinn's "Representative American Plays" (The Century Co.). "Shenandoah" is also in the same collection.

The student should also consult Professor Quinn's two-volume "A History of the American Drama, from the Civil War to the Present." Harper & Bros.

Unfortunately, there is no text of Herne's "Griffith Davenport," but Fitch's "Barbara Frietchie" will be found in the four-volume collection of his plays, edited by Montrose J. Moses (Little Brown & Co.), and Herne's "Shore Acres" and "Sag Harbor" are published by Sam. French.

"The Stage in America," by Norman Hapgood (The Macmillan Co., 1901), contains—pp. 61 ff.—a contemporary account of the production of "Griffith Davenport" and of the acting of Gillette in "Secret Service," etc.

In Hamlin Garland's autobiography, "A Son of the Middle Border," the student will find an interesting description of Garland's friendship with Herne in Boston, at the time "Margaret Fleming" was produced, and from Garland's account of his own efforts at that period to bring realism into American fiction, the reader gets a clear idea of the even greater difficulties of getting it into American drama.

REFERENCES, SEC. 36

"The Girl of the Golden West" is found in "Six Plays," by David Belasco (Little Brown & Co.), also in "Representative American Plays," Montrose J. Moses, editor.

The plays of Clyde Fitch, edited with an introduction by Montrose J. Moses, in 4 vols. Little Brown & Co.

"The Climbers" and other Fitch plays may also be secured separately. The Macmillan Co., 1905.

"The Great Divide," by William Vaughn Moody (The Macmillan Co., 1909).

See also Arthur Hobson Quinn, "A History of American Drama," and Barrett H. Clark, "A Study of Modern Drama."

REFERENCES, SEC. 37

"The Witching Hour," by Augustus Thomas, will be found in "Representative American Dramas," by Montrose J. Moses, and also in Prof. Quinn's "Representative American Plays."

"The College Widow," by George Ade. Samuel French, New York.

"The First Year," by Frank Craven, is published by Samuel French, New York. It should certainly be read by all students of this book.

"What Price Glory," by Maxwell and Anderson and Laurence Stallings, is published in a volume called "Three American Plays." Harcourt, Brace & Co.

"The Racket," by Bartlett Cormack. Samuel French.

"Spread Eagle," by Brooks and Lister. Chas. Scribner's Sons.

"Chicago," by Maurine Watkins. Alfred Knopf.

"The Show Off," by George Kelly. Little Brown & Co.

"Broadway," by Dunning and Abbott. Doran Co.

"The Adding Machine," by Elmer Rice, is best studied in the Theatre Guild Edition (Doubleday Page) because there are printed illustrations of the stage sets. It will also be found in Moses' "Representative American Dramas, National and Local." Little Brown & Co.

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"In Abraham's Bosom" and "The Field God" are issued together in one volume. McBride.

See also "Paul Green," by Barrett H. Clark. McBride.

Other plays by the Carolina Playmakers will be found in three volumes issued by Henry Holt & Co.

The plays of Eugene O'Neill are issued separately, and in a collection of two volumes, by Boni & Liveright. The collection does not include "Strange Interlude."

"The Hairy Ape" is printed in "Contemporary Plays," selected by Thomas H. Dickenson and Jack R. Crawford. Houghton Mifflin Co.

"The Emperor Jones" is printed in "Contemporary American Plays." edited by Prof. Arthur Hobson Quinn. Chas. Scribner's Sons.

It is also in "Representative American Plays, National and Local," edited by Montrose J. Moses. Little Brown & Co.

Barrett H. Clark's "Eugene O'Neill" (McBride, New York, 1927) is the best available biographical and critical study of O'Neill.

"Contemporary Plays," edited by Thomas H. Dickinson (Houghton Mifflin Co.), is an excellent collection of modern English and American drama.

"English Comedy," by Ashley H. Thorndike (Macmillan Co.), will be found a useful and entertaining study of the development of comedy on the stage, down to the present day.

So great has been the interchange of influences in the world theatre in the

twentieth century that a study of modern American or English drama can hardly approximate completeness without a study, also, of the drama and the theatre of other countries. Translations of important foreign plays are available in English, and there are numerous text-books to serve as guides, among the best being Barrett H. Clark's "A Study of the Modern Drama." The new drama, however, is intimately associated with new methods of stagecraft, and new ideals of theatrical illusion. The student should certainly consult "The Theatre of Tomorrow," by Kenneth Macgowan (Boni & Liveright, 1921), and Sheldon Cheney's "Stage Decoration" (John Day Co., 1928). Mr. Cheney's book is useful for an entire history of stage decoration, but particularly valuable for its illustrations of modern scenic experiment and the backgrounds which are being evolved to comport with new types of plays.

Finally, the student who wishes to keep in touch with the best and most progressive in the modern theatre should subscribe to, or see that his library subscribes to, *The Theatre Arts Monthly*, a magazine published in New York, but drawing its material from the world stage.

INDEX

Abbey Theatre, Dublin, 287–288
Abbott, George, 320–322; "Broadway" with Dunning, 320–322
"Abraham and Isaac," 31–35
"Abraham Lincoln" (Drinkwater), 286, 330
Actors, professional, first in interludes, 57; of Shakespeare's time, 112–113; importance of, in realistic drama, 319
Adam play, in France, 21–23
"Adding Machine, The" (Rice), 322; analysis of, 323–325
Ade, George, 295, 313; "The College Widow," 313; "Fables in Slang," dramatized, 313
"Admirable Crichton, The" (Barrie), 273, 278, 282, 284; analysis of, 274–277
"Alabama" (Thomas), 294
"Alexander and Campaspe" (Lyly), 71–73
Ames, Winthrop, productions of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, 245
Anderson, Mary, in "Pygmalion and Galatea," 244
Anderson, Maxwell, 315–316; "What Price Glory" with Stallings, 170, 263, 315–316
"Androcles and the Lion" (Shaw), 263
Anglin, Margaret, in "The Great Divide," 310
"Anna Christie" (O'Neill), 331, 332, 333
"Anthony and Cleopatra" (Shakespeare), 105, 106
Archer, William, author of "The Old Drama and the New," 114, 133, 134, 135, 188, 340–341; criticism of Otway's "Venice Preserved," 171, 172, 173; criticism of Holcroft's "The Road to Ruin," 207
"Arden of Feversham," 108, 190
"Arizona" (Thomas), 123, 294
"Arms and the Man" (Shaw), 261; analysis of, 264–268
"As a Man Thinks" (Thomas), 313
"As You Like It" (Shakespeare), 101, 122, 124, 201

"Back to Methuselah" (Shaw), 263–264
Baker, Benjamin, 229, 232; "A Glance at New York," 232; "The Indian Maid," opera, 229
Baker, Professor George P., on theatre of Shakespeare's day, 106, 112; drama course at Harvard, training of O'Neill, 331
Bancroft, Mr. and Mrs. (Sir Squire and Marie Milton), 238, 239, 241, 254; comparison with Vestris and Mathews, 238, 297
"Barbara Frietchie" (Fitch), 301, 306
Barker, Granville, 271; "Madras House," 271
Barrett, Wilson, 248
Barrie, J. M., 237, 273–282, 342; contrast with Shaw, 273, 277; contribution to modern drama, 274; likeness to Shaw, 274, 282; mastery of technic, 282; "The Admirable Crichton," 273, 274–277; 278, 282, 284; "Dear Brutus," 277–281; "A Kiss for Cinderella," 281; "Mary Rose," 274; "Peter Pan," 273, 281, 282; "Shall We Join the Ladies?" 281–282; "The Will," 281
Bates, Blanche, in "Madame Butterfly," 302; in "The Girl of the Golden West," 303
Beaumont, Francis, 136; collaboration with Fletcher, 136; their contribution in dialogue and in burlesque, 137–138; popularity during Restoration, 162; "The Knight of the Burning Pestle" with Fletcher, 141–144; "The Maid's Tragedy" with Fletcher, 138, 139–141; "Philaster" with Fletcher, 137
"Beaux' Stratagem, The" (Farquhar), 178–180; relation to Restoration comedies, 179; analysis of, 179–180; contrast with "The Conscious Lovers," 184
"Beggars' Opera, The" (Gay), 194; analysis of, 195–196; compared with "Pinafore," 246
Behn, Mrs. Aphra, 169
Belasco, David, 302–305, 306, 313; influence on American drama, 297, 305; his art of directing, 320; "The Girl of the Golden West," 303–305, 310, 312, 313; "Madame Butterfly" with Long, 302–303
Betterton, greatest actor of Restoration, 162

"Beyond the Horizon" (O'Neill), 331, 333
Bingham, Amelia, 307
Blackfriars Theatre, 123
Booth, Edwin, 146
Boston Theatre, stage of, 156
Boucicault, Dion, 223–226, 241; adaptation of French plays, 233; in America, 233–236; "London Assurance," 90, 223–225, 233, 250, 276; "The Octoroon," 233, 234–236, 293
"Bound East for Cardiff" (O'Neill), analysis of, 333
"Broadway" (Dunning and Abbott), analysis of, 320–322
Brome, "Abraham and Isaac," 31–35
Brooks, George S., 316; "Spread Eagle" with Lister, 316
Brougham, John, 230; his burlesque, "Pocahontas," 230
Burbage, John, built first theatre in England, 75–76; leased Blackfriars, 123
Burlesque, of Vestris and Mathews, 222; popularity of, in America in middle of nineteenth century, 230; of Harrigan and Hart, 294; and realism, 316

"Candida" (Shaw), 269
"Case of Rebellious Susan, The" (Jones), 251
"Caste" (Robertson), 238, 250; importance of staging and production, 238; analysis of, 239–241
"Cato" (Addison), 191
"Cenci, The" (Shelley), 215–219; introduction to, 216; comparison with "Macbeth," 218; influence of Shakespeare, 218–219
Chambers's "The Mediæval Stage," 13, 15
Chanfrau, Frank S., 232–233; importance of his impersonation, 233
Character delineation, in Shakespeare's plays, 101–103
Chester cycle, 31 n.
"Chicago" (Watkins), 316
Church drama, beginnings of, 13; *Quem quæritis* ceremony on Easter morning, 14–16; development of, 19–20; transition to market-square, 19–30
"Circle, The" (Maugham), 291
Classic laws of continental drama, ignored by Shakespeare, 107
"Climbers, The" (Fitch), 306; analysis of, 307–308
Cockpit Theatre, 123
Cohan, George M., 295, 313; his contribution to farce, 314; "Seven Keys to Baldpate," 314
"College Widow, The" (Ade), 313
Collier, Jeremy, attack on theatres, 166; "A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage," 177
Comedy and tragedy, distinction between, 213
Comedy of manners, beginning with Etherege, 160; analysis of, during Restoration, 161–162; Wycherley and Congreve, 162; Sheridan, 202–205; Jones, 252–253; Shaw, 263, 264–266, 268; Barrie, 274; Noel Coward and Frederick Lonsdale, 291; Bronson Howard, 294; Fitch, 306
Congreve, William, 72, 162, 165–170, 177, 182, 194, 202, 203, 213, 231; compared with Farquhar, 179, 180; compared with Steele, 183; model for Sheridan, 186; "Love for Love," 165–170, 183, 184, 207, 213. 253; "The Way of the World," 165–166
Connelly, Marc, 295
"Conscious Lovers, The" (Steele), 183; based on Terence's "Andria," 183; a "play with a purpose," 184
"Constant Couple, The" (Farquhar), 178, 201
"Contrast, The" (Tyler), first native American play, 220, 227, 232; development of American drama from, 340
Cormack, Bartlett, 316; "The Racket," 316
Corneille, 69
"Countess Cathleen, The" (Yeats), 287
Court theatres of Charles I's time, 145
Covent Garden Theatre, 197, 215, 217, 221; managed by Vestris and Mathews, 223, 226
Coventry cycle, 31 n.
Coward, Noel, 291; "The Vortex," 291
"Craig's Wife" (Kelly), 309
Crane, William H., in burlesque, 230
Craven, Frank, 295, 314; "The First Year," 314
Cumberland, Richard, 199
Custis, George Washington Park, author of "Pocahontas," 229–230
"Cymbeline" (Shakespeare), 125, 137

Daly, Arnold, in Shaw's plays, 261
D'Avenant, manager of one of Charles II's theatres, 154
"Dear Brutus" (Barrie), analysis of, 277–281; comparison with "A Midsummer Night's Dream," 280–281
Definition of drama, 1–4; Brunetière's theory, 2; Professor Baker's use of *dramatic*, 3
"Devil's Disciple, The" (Shaw), 83, 261, 269
Dixey, Henry E., in burlesque, 230
"Dr. Faustus" (Marlowe), 90, 104, 105

"Douglas" (Home), 199
Drew, John, 222, 251–
Drew, Mrs. John, in "The Rivals," 202
Drinkwater, John, 286, 330; "Abraham Lincoln," 286, 330
Drury Lane Theatre, 182, 190, 197, 198, 212, 215, 221, 222
Dryden, John, 162
"Duchess of Malfi, The" (Webster), 125, 126; analysis of, 131–135; foreshadowing of Restoration drama, 151
Dunning, Philip, 320–322; "Broadway," with Abbott, 320–322

"Easiest Way, The" (Walter), 313
"Edward II" (Marlowe), 90
Elizabethan theatre, 76–78
"Emperor Jones, The" (O'Neill), 286, 333; comparison with "Dr. Faustus," 98; analysis of, 333–334
"Engaged" (Gilbert), 245
"Escape" (Galsworthy), 283, 286
Ethelwold, Bishop of Winchester, description of dramatized Easter trope, 14
Etherege, Sir George, father of comedy of manners, 160–161, 162, 202, 252; compared with Farquhar, 179; "Love in a Tub," 160
"Everyman," 47–54, 90
"Every Man in His Humour" (Jonson), 55, 114–122; influence of, 116; analysis of, 116–121; model for Restoration comedy, 122
Expressionism, in American drama, 323

"Fables in Slang"(Ade), dramatized, 313
"Faith Healer, The"(Moody), 310
Farce: Hoyt, 295–296; Cohan, 314
Farquhar, George, 162, 178–180, 289; "The Beaux' Stratagem," 178–180, 184; "The Constant Couple," 178, 201; "Love and a Bottle," 178; "The Recruiting Officer," 179; "Sir Harry Wildair," 178
"Fashion" (Mowatt), 231; revival in 1924, 231; analysis of, 231–232
"Faustus, The Tragical History of Dr.," (Marlowe), 90, 104, 105
"Field God, The" (Green), 289, 330
Fielding, Henry, manager of Haymarket Theatre, 192, 194, 199
"First Year, The" (Craven), 314
Fiske, Mrs., in "The Rivals," 202
Fitch, Clyde, 301, 305–309, 313; influence of the French, of Wilde, of Jones, and of Shaw, 306; "Barbara Frietchie," 301, 306; "The Climbers," 306, 307–308; "Nathan Hale," 306; "The Truth," 308–309, 310
Fletcher, John, 136, 145; collaboration with Beaumont, 136; their contribution in dialogue and in burlesque, 137–138; popularity during Restoration, 162; "The Knight of the Burning Pestle" with Beaumont, 141–144; "The Maid's Tragedy" with Beaumont, 138, 139–141; "Philaster" with Beaumont, 137
Florence, William, in burlesque, 230
Folk theatre in America, 328–330
Foote, Samuel, at Haymarket Theatre, 199
Fortune Theatre, 110
"Four P's, The" (John Heywood), 58–62
French influence, 161, 167, 243, 247, 254, 255, 306
Frohman, Daniel, 206

Galsworthy, John, 283–286, 291, 336, 342; statement of dramatic purpose in "Some Platitudes Concerning Drama," 283; technic of Pinero, 283; realism and rationalism of, 284; comparison with Shaw, 284, 286; "Escape," 283, 286; "Justice," 284–286, 336; "The Pigeon," 283, 284; "The Silver Box," 125, 193, 283; "The Skin Game," 291; "Strife," 284
"Gammer Gurton's Needle," 67
Garrick, David, 115, 198; at Drury Lane, established new standard of acting and production, 182; advice to Sheridan, 204
Gay, John, 194–196; "The Beggars' Opera," 194, 195–196, 246
"Getting Married" (Shaw), 264, 284, 318; analysis of, 268–271
Gilbert, William Schwenk, 59, 61, 195; early plays, 244; "Engaged," 245; "Pygmalion and Galatea," 244; with Sullivan, 245–246; "Iolanthe" with Sullivan, 246; "The Mikado" with Sullivan, 246; "Patience" with Sullivan, 61, 246; "Pinafore" with Sullivan, 246
Gillette, William, 236, 242, 298–301, 315; in "Dear Brutus," 277; influence on American drama, 297; "Secret Service," 298, 299–301
"Girl of the Golden West, The" (Belasco), 303–305, 313; analysis of, 303–305; comparison with "The Great Divide," 310, 312
"Glance at New York, A" (Baker), 232
Goldsmith, Oliver, 182, 200–202, 208, 227; "The Good Natured Man," 200; "She Stoops to Conquer," 200, 201–202
"Good Natured Man, The" (Goldsmith), 200
Goodwin, Nat, in burlesque, 230
"Gorboduc" (Thomas Norton and

Thomas Sackville), first English tragedy, 69
"Great Divide, The" (Moody), 310–312, 313; analysis of, 310–312; comparison with "The Girl of the Golden West," 310, 312
"Great God Brown, The" (O'Neill), use of masks, 336, 338
Greek drama, 5
Green, Paul, 287, 289–330, 331; development from academic training, 328; "The Field God," 289, 330; "In Abraham's Bosom," 328, 330, 335; "White Dresses," 329
Greet, Ben, players, presentation of "Everyman," 47; of "Dr. Faustus," 92, 95
Gregory, Lady, 288, 328
"Griffith Davenport" (Herne), 301
Guilds (trade), presentation of mystery cycles in England, 27–30

"H. M. S. Pinafore" (Gilbert and Sullivan), *see* "Pinafore"
"Hairy Ape, The" (O'Neill), 125, 335–336; influence of Synge, 289; analysis of, 335–336; similarity in purpose to "Justice," 336
"Hamlet" (Shakespeare), 46, 101, 113, 135, 217, 338; comparison with "The Spanish Tragedy," 79, 84, 87–88; influence on Congreve, 168
Hampden, Walter, 146
Hare, John, character actor, 240
Harrigan and Hart, burlesques of, 294, 313; "The Mulligan Guards," 295
Haymarket Theatre, 192, 194
Herman, Henry, with Jones, 248; "The Silver King," with Jones, 248–249, 299, 316
Herne, James A., 242, 294, 301; influence on American drama, 297; "Griffith Davenport," 301; "Margaret Fleming," 294; "Shore Acres," 294
Heywood, John, author of "The Four P's," 58
Heywood, Thomas, 126–130; "A Woman Killed with Kindness," 108, 126–130, 190
"Hindle Wakes" (Houghton), 288
Holcroft, Thomas, 206–209, 213; "The Road to Ruin," 206, 207–209, 213
Holland, George, in "The Octoroon," 233
Hopkins, Arthur, 331
Hornimann, Miss A. E. F., financial aid to Abbey Theatre, 287–288; founding of Manchester Repertory Theatre, 288
Houghton, Stanley, 288; "Hindle Wakes," 288
Howard, Bronson, 242, 294; "Shenandoah," 294
Howard, Sidney, author of "The Silver Cord," 309
Hoyt, Charles H., farces of, 295–296, 313; "A Texas Steer," 295–297, 313; "A Trip to Chinatown," 295
"Hyde Park" (Shirley), 146

Ibsen, Henrik, influence of, 47, 90, 243, 247, 254, 255, 268, 338; Shaw's enthusiasm for, 261; "Peer Gynt," 278
"Importance of Being Earnest, The" (Wilde), 251
"In Abraham's Bosom" (Green), 328, 330, 335
"In the Shadow of the Glen" (Synge), 288; analysis of, 289
"Indian Maid, The" (Baker's opera), 229
Interludes, 55–62; definition, 57; "The Four P's," 58–62; expanded into genuine play in "Ralph Roister Doister," 63–67
"Iolanthe" (Gilbert and Sullivan), 246
Irish revival in drama, 287–291

Jefferson, Joseph, in "The Rivals," 202; in burlesque, 230; in "The Octoroon," 233
Jones, Henry Arthur, 247–253, 254, 294, 306; his theory of drama compared with Jonson's, 117; importance of, to English drama, 247–253; influence of Ibsen on, 247, 249; as critic, 247, 249; "The Case of Rebellious Susan," 251; "Judah," 250; "The Liars," 251, 252–253, 274; "Michael and his Lost Angel," 250; Saints and Sinners," 249, 254; "The Silver King" with Herman, 248–249, 299, 316
Jones, Inigo, designer of Court masques, 154
Jones, Robert Edmond, 331
Jonson, Ben, 106, 110–122, 149, 194, 202, 235; influence of, 110, 241; compared with Shaw, 114; influence on comedy of manners, 162; popularity during Restoration, 162; persistence of "type" characters, 188; "Every Man in His Humour," 55, 114–122
"Journey to London, A" (Vanbrugh), 177
"Judah" (Jones), 250
"Julius Cæsar" (Shakespeare), 101
"Juno and the Paycock" (O'Casey), 290
"Justice" (Galsworthy), analysis of, 284–286; similarity in purpose to "The Hairy Ape," 336

Kaufman, George, 295
Kelly, George, 288, 309, 317–319; "Craig's Wife," 309; "The Show-Off," 288, 317–319
Kelly, Hugh, 199

Killigrew, manager of one of Charles II's theatres, 154
"King Lear" (Shakespeare), 106, 135
"Kiss for Cinderella, A" (Barrie), 281
"Knight of the Burning Pestle, The" (Beaumont and Fletcher), 141–144
Knowles, Sheridan, 215
Kotzebue, 209, 215; "The Stranger," 211
Kyd, Thomas, author of "The Spanish Tragedy," 74; influence on Shakespeare ("Hamlet"), 74; his contribution to English drama, 87–88

"Lady of Pleasure, The" (Shirley), 146, 151; analysis of, 149–150; foreshadowing of Restoration drama, 151
Lamb, Charles, 207, 208; on Elizabethan drama, 210
"Lazarus Laughed" (O'Neill), 331; use of masks, 336
"Liars, The" (Jones), 274; success of, 251; analysis of, 252–253
Lillo, George, 190–193, 196, 200, 207, 286; "The London Merchant, or the History of George Barnwell," 190, 191, 192–193
Lister, Walter B., 316; "Spread Eagle" with Brooks, 316
Liturgical (church) drama, beginnings in Easter service, 14–16
"Local" drama, 287–292
"London Assurance" (Boucicault), 90, 223–225, 233, 250, 276; analysis of, 224–225
"London Merchant, or the History of George Barnwell, The" (Lillo), 190; landmark in English theatre, 191; analysis of, 192–193
Long, John Luther, 302; "Madame Butterfly" with Belasco, 302–303
Lonsdale, Frederick, 291
"Love and a Bottle" (Farquhar), 178
"Love for Love" (Congreve), 165–170, 183, 207, 213, 253; comparison with "The Way of the World" in revival, 166; dialogue, 169; analysis of, 166–170; debt to "Hamlet," 168; contrast with "The Conscious Lovers," 184
"Love in a Tub" (Etherege), his first play, 160
"Love Tricks" (Shirley), his first play, 149
Lyly, John, his Court comedies, 68–73; "Alexander and Campaspe," 71–73

"Macbeth" (Shakespeare), 46, 101, 102, 125, 126, 135, 290; comparison with "The Cenci," 218
Macgowan, Kenneth, 331
Macready, 222, 223
"Madame Butterfly" (Belasco and Long), 302–303; as libretto of Puccini's opera, 302
"Madras House" (Barker), 271
"Maid's Tragedy, The" (Beaumont and Fletcher), 138; long popularity of, 138; dialogue in, 139–141
"Major Barbara" (Shaw), 271
"Man from Home, The" (Tarkington), 228
Manchester Repertory Theatre, founded by Miss Hornimann, 288; emphasis on realism and native elements, 288
Mansfield, Richard, in "Arms and the Man" and "The Devil's Disciple," 261
Mantzius, Karl, author of "History of Theatrical Art," 197
"Margaret Flemming" (Herne), 294
Marlowe, Christopher, 69, 76, 89, 124, 137; his contribution to English drama, 89–91; "Dr. Faustus," 90, 104, 105; "Edward II," 90
Marlowe, Julia, in "Barbara Frietchie," 301
"Mary Rose" (Barrie), 274
Massinger, Philip, 146–148; "A New Way to Pay Old Debts," 146, 147–148
Mathews, Charles, and Madame Vestris, 221–226; comparison with the Bancrofts, 238, 297; his art, 222; compared with John Drew, 222
Matthews, Brander, and Luder, Paul R.: "The Chief British Dramatists," 130–131
Matthison, Edith Wynne, as *Everyman*, 47, 48
Maugham, Somerset, 291; "The Circle," 291
Mediæval drama, 6, 32, 45
Melodrama, heroic tragedy of Restoration, 162; flourished in England and America during last quarter of nineteenth century, 243; of Jones, 248; romantic melodrama of Belasco, 305; realistic melodrama, 316, 320
"Merchant of Venice, The" (Shakespeare), 101–102, 115, 341
"Michael and His Lost Angel" (Jones), 250; modern drama, 250
"Mid-Channel" (Pinero), 260
"Midsummer Night's Dream, A" (Shakespeare), 101; suggestion for Barrie's "Dear Brutus," 280–281
"Mikado, The" (Gilbert and Sullivan), 246
Miller, Henry, 310; in "The Great Divide," 310
Milne, A. A., 291
Minstrels, Negro, in America, 231, 293
Molière, influence of, on English comedy

of manners, 161, 243; influence on Congreve, 167
Moody, William Vaughn, 309–312, 313; "The Faith Healer," 310; "The Great Divide," 310–312, 313
Moore's "Hail and Farewell," account of attempt to start Irish national theatre, 287
Moralities, 44–54; Paternoster plays at York, 44; "Everyman," 46–54
Moses' "Representative American Dramas, National and Local," 295
Motion pictures, 326–327
Mowatt, Anna Cora, author of "Fashion," 231–232
"Mrs. Dane's Defence" (Pinero), 260
"Mrs. Warren's Profession" (Shaw), censored, 261
"Mulligan Guards, The" (Harrigan and Hart), 295
Musical comedy, beginning with "The Beggars' Opera," 196; Gilbert and Sullivan, 245
Mystery, or miracle, plays, beginning of, 25; definitions, 26; comparison of English and French, 26–27; presented by trade guilds, 27–30

"Nathan Hale" (Fitch), 306
National drama, transition from international church drama, 25
"New Way to Pay Old Debts, A" (Massinger), 146; long life in theatre, 146; analysis of, 147–148
Nicoll's "British Drama," 31 n., 87, 128
Norton, Thomas, 69; "Gorboduc" with Sackville, 69

O'Casey, Sean, 290–291; juxtaposition of comedy and tragedy in plays of, 290–291; "Juno and the Paycock," 290; "The Plough and the Stars," 290, 291
"Octoroon, The" (Boucicault), 233, 293; "local color" of, 234; analysis of, 234–235; importance of, 235–236
"Olympic Revels, The," of Madame Vestris, 222
Olympic Theatre, and Madame Vestris, 221, 222
O'Neill, Eugene, 46, 98, 287, 289, 331–340; influence of Synge on, 289; development from academic training, 331; influence of Strindberg on, 332; importance of, to modern drama, 342; "Anna Christie," 331, 332, 333; "Beyond the Horizon," 331, 333; "Bound East for Cardiff," 333; "The Emperor Jones," 98, 286, 333–334; "The Great God Brown," 336, 338; "The Hairy Ape," 125, 289, 335–336; "Lazarus Laughed," 331, 336; "Strange Interlude," 337–340
Operetta, *see* Musical comedy
"Orphan, The" (Otway), 190
"Othello" (Shakespeare), 101, 102, 106, 125, 127, 132, 135
Otway, Thomas, 171–175, 190; "The Orphan," 190; "Venice Preserved," 171, 172–175, 187, 191, 213
"Outward Bound" (Vane), 278

Pageant stage ("float" or wagon), 28–30, 32, 42
Pasadena Community Playhouse, production of "Lazarus Laughed," 331
Pastoral farce, beginning in England with Second Shepherds' play, 36
"Patience" (Gilbert and Sullivan), 61, 246
Permanent theatres, beginning of, 74
"Peter Pan" (Barrie), 273, 281, 282
"Philaster" (Beaumont and Fletcher), 137
"Pigeon, The" (Galsworthy), 283, 284
"Pinafore" (Gilbert and Sullivan), popularity of, 246
Pinero, Arthur Wing, 202, 247–260, 263, 264, 266, 269, 294, 306, 313; importance to English drama, 247; influence of Ibsen on, 247; "Mid-Channel," 260; "Mrs. Dane's Defence," 260; "The Profligate," 254; "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," 254–260, 264, 266; "Sweet Lavender," 254; "The Thunderbolt," 260
"Pizarro" (Kotzebue, translation by Sheridan), 209–210, 211; analysis of, 212; comparison with "The Road to Ruin," 213
"Plain Dealer, The" (Wycherley), 176, 203
Planché, J. R., 221, 222
"Plough and the Stars, The" (O'Casey), 290, 291
"Pocahontas" (Brougham's burlesque), 230
"Pocahontas" (George Washington Park Custis), 229–230
Prince of Wales Theatre, 238
"Profligate, The" (Pinero), 254
Provincetown Players, production of O'Neill's plays, 331, 333, 335
"Provoked Wife, The" (Vanbrugh), 176
Purcell, Henry, composer of operas, 193
Puritan hostility to the theatre, Bishop Hooper's "Early Writings," 17–18
"Pygmalion" (Shaw), 244, 263
"Pygmalion and Galatea" (Gilbert), 244

Quem quæritis ceremony on Easter morning, 14–16
Quinn, Professor, author of "Specimens

of American Drama," 229; "Representative American Plays," 298

Racine, 69
"Racket, The" (Cormack), 316
"Ralph Roister Doister" (Nicholas Udall), first English comedy, 63–67, 69, 78, 112; contribution to English drama, 67; comparison with "Every Man in His Humour," 121
Realism, of action; in Galsworthy's plays, 284; importance in American drama, 298; application to farce and genre comedy, 313–315; application to melodrama, 315; of speech and acting, 322; of character portrayal and of plot, 341; reaction away from, 342
"Recruiting Officer, The" (Farquhar), 179
Red Bull Theatre, 123
"Rehearsal, The" (Buckingham), 194
Reinhardt, Max, 54
Renaissance, interest in classic literature, 63; attention to style, 70
Repertoire, first professional, in interludes, 57
Restoration drama, 153–164, 341; stage, 155–158; women playing women's parts, 158–159; social background, 159–160; comedy of manners, 160; heroic tragedy developed, 162; formal rhetoric, 163; emphasis on style, 163
Rice, Elmer, 322–325; "The Adding Machine," 322, 323–325
"Richard III" (Shakespeare), 101, 340
"Riders to the Sea" (Synge), 289
"Rivals, The" (Sheridan), 200; comparison with "Ralph Roister Doister," 66; analysis of, 202
"Road to Ruin, The" (Holcroft), 206; debt to Steele, Lillo, and Goldsmith, 207; analysis of, 207–209; comparison with "Pizarro," 213
Robertson, Agnes (wife of Boucicault), in "The Octoroon," 233
Robertson, Tom, 238–241, 246, 247, 254, 293; importance in development of drama, 241, 243; "Caste," 238, 239–241, 250; "Society," 238
Roman drama, 5–6; death of, 9
"Romeo and Juliet" (Shakespeare), 92, 101, 129
Royal Theatres, 194, 220

Sackville, Thomas, 69; "Gorboduc" with Norton, 69
St. Augustine on the theatre, quotation, 6–9
"Saint Joan" (Shaw), 271, 291
"Saints and Sinners" (Jones), 249, 254
"School for Scandal, The" (Sheridan), 182, 200, 227; early hints of, 149, 150; debt to Wycherley, 203; analysis of, 203–204; revival in 1925, 204; not an advance in drama, 205, 206
"Second Mrs. Tanqueray, The" (Pinero), 254–260, 264, 266; importance in development of drama, 255; analysis of, 256–257; criticism of, by Shaw, 255, 258–259
Second Shepherds' play, 36–43, 57
"Secret Service" (Gillette), "realism of action" in, 298; analysis of, 299–301
Seneca, influence of, on early English tragedy, 69; on Kyd's "The Spanish Tragedy," 79
"Sentimental comedy," 186–188
"Seven Keys to Baldpate" (Cohan), 314
Shakespeare, 46, 55, 64, 69, 76, 100–109, 124, 125, 194, 198, 211, 214, 215, 222, 226, 237, 241, 278, 280, 290, 324, 338, 340, 341, 342; comparison with Kyd, 79, 84, 87–88, 163; comparison with Marlowe, 89, 92, 104; contribution to drama, 101; disregard of classic laws of continental drama, 107–108; and criticism by Voltaire, 108; influenced by Beaumont and Fletcher, 137; too poetic for Restoration taste, 162; restored to stage in eighteenth century, 182; influence on Shelley, 218–219; burlesqued on American stage, 230; "Antony and Cleopatra," 105, 106; "As You Like It," 101, 122, 124, 201; "Cymbeline," 125, 137; "Hamlet," 46, 79, 84, 87–88, 101, 113, 135, 168, 217, 338; "Julius Cæsar," 101; "King Lear," 106, 135; "Macbeth," 46, 101, 102, 125, 126, 135, 218, 290; "The Merchant of Venice," 101–102, 115, 341; "A Midsummer Night's Dream," 101, 280–281; "Othello," 101, 102, 106, 125, 127, 132, 135; "Richard III," 101, 340; "Romeo and Juliet," 92, 101, 129; "Twelfth Night," 101, 104, 127; "A Winter's Tale," 137
"Shall We Join the Ladies?" (Barrie), 281–282
Shaw, G. B., 72, 83, 237, 244, 261–272, 291, 294, 306, 318, 324, 327, 341, 342; compared with Jonson, 114; debt to Gilbert, 246; "Dramatic Opinions and Essays," review of Jones's "Michael and His Lost Angel" in, 250; *Saturday Review* articles on Pinerotic drama, 255; criticism of "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," 255, 258–259; his championship of Ibsen, 261, 268; philosophy of, 262; characteristics of Ibsen, Wycherley, and Congreve, 262; revolutionary aspect of, 262–263; influence of, 264; serious purpose of, 263, 266; "static drama"

of, 268, 271; contrast with Barrie, 273, 277; likeness to Barrie, 274, 282; mastery of technic, 282; comparison with Galsworthy, 284, 286; "Androcles and the Lion," 263; "Arms and the Man," 261, 264–268; "Back to Methuselah," 263–264; "Candida," 269; "The Devil's Disciple," 83, 261, 269; "Getting Married," 264, 268–271, 284, 318; "Major Barbara," 271; "Mrs. Warren's Profession," 261; "Pygmalion," 244, 263; "Saint Joan," 271, 291
"She Stoops to Conquer" (Goldsmith), 200; debt to "As You Like It" and "The Constant Couple," 201; not an advance in drama, 201–202
Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 210; theory of drama in introduction to "The Cenci," 216; debt to Shakespeare, 216; "The Cenci," 215–219
"Shenandoah" (Howard), 294
Sheridan, Richard, 72, 182, 186, 196, 200, 202–205, 208, 213, 228, 231; translation and production of Kotzebue's "Pizarro," 209, 212; "The Rivals," 66, 200, 202; "The School for Scandal," 149, 150, 182, 200, 203–204, 205, 206, 227
Shirley, James, 145, 149–150, 151; "Hyde Park," 146; "The Lady of Pleasure," 146, 149–150, 151; "Love Tricks," 149
"Shore Acres" (Herne), 294
"Show-Off, The" (Kelly), 288; analysis of, 317–319
Siddons, Mrs., 215; in "Pizarro," 210
"Silver Box, The" (Galsworthy), 125, 193, 283
"Silver Cord, The" (Sidney Howard), 309
"Silver King, The" (Jones and Herman), 248–249, 316; contrast with "Secret Service," 299
Simonson, Lee, 323
"Sir Harry Wildair" (Farquhar), 178
"Skin Game, The" (Galsworthy), 291
"Society" (Robertson), 238
"Spanish Tragedy, The" (Thomas Kyd), 74, 103, 119; influence on Shakespeare ("Hamlet"), 74; relation to Elizabethan stage, 79
"Spread Eagle" (Brooks and Lister), 316
Stage, development of: pageant stage, 28–30, 32, 42; Elizabethan, use of scenery, 77–78; of Shakespeare's time, 110–113; increasing use of scenery in Restoration theatres, 154; alternating scenes, 156; modern picture-frame stage, 239; importance in modern drama of settings and lighting, 322, 324
Stage Society, first production of Shaw's plays in England, 261
Stallings, Lawrence, 315–316; "What Price Glory" with Anderson, 170, 263, 315–316
Steele, Richard, 183–189, 196, 200, 207; "Sir Roger de Coverley Papers," 183; theories about comedy, 183; "play with a purpose," 184; "sentimental comedy," 186–187; "The Conscious Lovers," 183, 184
Stoddart, J. H., in "The Octoroon," 233
"Strange Interlude" (O'Neill), 337–340; use of soliloquy, 338; analysis of, 339–340
"Stranger, The" (Kotzebue), 211
"Strife" (Galsworthy), 284
Sullivan, Arthur, with Gilbert, 245–246; "Iolanthe" with Gilbert, 246; "The Mikado" with Gilbert, 246; "Patience" with Gilbert, 61, 246; "Pinafore" with Gilbert, 246
Summary, 341–343
"Sun Up" (Vollmer), 288
"Sweet Lavender" (Pinero), 254
Synge, John Millington, 288–290, 291, 328, 329; influence of his rhythmic dialogue, 289; "In the Shadow of the Glen," 288, 289; "Riders to the Sea," 289

Tarkington, Booth, 228; "The Man from Home," 228
Terence, influence of, on early English drama, 63, 68; influence on Steele, 183
"Texas Steer, A" (Hoyt), 295–297, 313
Theatre, first permanent, in England built by Burbage, 75; Elizabethan, 76–78; effect on drama of Shakespeare's time, 110–113; private theatres established, 123–124; Court theatres of Charles I's time, 145; Cromwell closes the theatres, 151; of Charles II's time, 153–164; of Garrick's time, 198–200
Theatre Guild, in America, 323; production of O'Neill's plays, 331, 337
Thomas, Augustus, 123, 294, 313; "Alabama," 294; "Arizona," 123, 294; "As a Man Thinks," 313; "The Witching Hour," 313
"Thunderbolt, The" (Pinero), 260
"Townley" or Wakefield cycle, 31 n., 36
Tragedy, prose "tragedy of the humble," Lillo's "The London Merchant," 190–193
"Trip to Chinatown, A" (Hoyt), 295
"Truth, The" (Fitch), 308–309, 310; analysis of, 308–309; influence of, 309
"Twelfth Night" (Shakespeare), 101, 104, 127
Tyler, Royal, 220, 227, 340; "The Contrast," 220, 227, 232, 340

Udall, Nicholas, author of "Ralph Roister Doister," 63, 66, 67, 78

Vanbrugh, Sir John, 162; compared with Farquhar, 179; "A Journey to London," 177; "The Provoked Wife," 176
Vane, Sutton, author of "Outward Bound," 278
"Venice Preserved" (Otway), 171, 187, 191, 213; analysis of, 172–175; Archer's criticism, 171, 172, 173; theatricality of, 175
Vernacular drama, transition from Latin, 21
Vestris, Madame, 221–226; her theatre, the Olympic, 221; with Mathews, her contribution to the drama, 222, 223; comparison with the Bancrofts, 238, 297; tour in America, 223; at Covent Garden, 223; "The Olympic Revels," 222
Vollmer, Lulu, 288; "Sun Up," 288
Voltaire, criticism of Shakespeare, 108; visit to Congreve, 165
"Vortex, The" (Coward), 291

Wagon stage ("float" or "pageant"), 28–30, 32, 42
Wakefield ("Townley") cycle, 31 n., 36
Walter, Eugene, 313; comparison with Pinero, 313; "The Easiest Way," 313
Watkins, Maurine, 316; "Chicago," 316
Watson, Professor, author of "From Sheridan to Robertson," 222
"Way of the World, The" (Congreve), 165–166; polished dialogue, 165; comparison with "Love for Love" in revival, 166
Webster, John, 130–135; "The Duchess of Malfi," 125, 126, 131–135, 151
"What Price Glory" (Stallings and Anderson), realistic dialogue of, 170; purpose of, 263; realistic action of, 315–316
"White Dresses" (Green), 329
Wilde, Oscar, 251, 294, 306; "The Importance of Being Earnest," 251
"Will, The" (Barrie), 281
Wilton, Marie, 238, 240
"Winter's Tale, A" (Shakespeare), 137
"Witching Hour, The" (Thomas), 313
"Woman Killed with Kindness, A" (Heywood), 108, 190; analysis of, 126–130
Wycherley, William, 161, 162, 176, 182, 194; compared with Steele, 183; model for Sheridan, 186, 203; "The Plain Dealer," 176, 203
Wyndham, Sir Charles, in "The Liars," 251–252

Yeats, W. B., 287, 288, 328; "The Countess Cathleen," 287
York cycle, 31 n.

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